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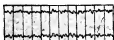


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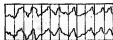
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Volume 9

AUGUST, 1958

Number 2

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TO OUR READERS This magazine has been STREAMLINED for your convenience. It contains the same number of pages and words as before, but you will find that the thinner paper makes it easier to read and handle. We would like to hear from you, telling us whether you approve or disapprove of this change, so won't you please drop us a card? Thank you. *The Editors.*

AUTHOR, AUTHOR!

D. A. JOURDAN appeared out of the blue some years ago, with a story entitled "Change of Color", which ran in the November 1954 issue of *Science Fiction Quarterly*. We thought it a fine story, as did our readers; and we wondered whether we would ever hear from the author again. It often happens that a person will have one first-class story to tell, but never be able to produce another that is even acceptable. It was with trepidation, therefore, that we started to read Mr. Jourdan's second offering, "Live In Amity"; needless to say, our fears were unwarranted. And, ever since, we have been receiving a different but equally well-thought-out tale from this author once or twice a year. Here's his latest!



A. BERTRAM CHANDLER, we have been told, is the pseudonym of a British author, some of whose stories have also appeared under his own name. The Chandler name first began to grace contents pages back in 1944; and the fact that he's still in demand now is proof enough that it wasn't merely the lack of competition in the war years that "made" him. You'll find another of his very individual tales in the August issue of *Future Science Fiction* — title: "The Song".



Novelet



LITTLE BROTHER

by D. A. Jourdan

Illustration by ORBAN

As a Watcher, Elbezed knew that he must not interfere with Earth people, must not let his existence become known to them. Yet, no Njidian ever refused to answer a cry for help...

ELBEZED, skimming monotonously through the gray quiet of space in his circular white ship, knew he was over what the Earth people called 'an ocean when he felt the fear. He was too far out in space to see the water, too far to see even the storm-cloud formations of their atmosphere which overspread that part of the ocean; but he

could feel the fear-emanations sent out by their flesh.

Although for thousands of years his own people had been hairless, Elbezed could feel the nerves of his skin—like those of the Earth people—quiver in an atavistic effort to raise their fur, in the ancient bluff of making themselves look larger and more frightening to the enemy.



Elbezed brought his ship down closer, in order to watch the behavior of the survivors . . .

Elbezed jeered at himself for this reaction; even for these primitive creatures, defense had not been that simple for thousands of years. The fear that he sensed, Elbezed knew, was of mechanical catastrophe rather than of any natural enemy: their aircraft was in immediate danger of mal-function.

In curiosity, and, because it was his duty as Watcher to inform himself, he took his ship out of orbit and drew closer to them. The thing that fascinated him most about these creatures was why they first put themselves in jeopardy—and then, when their self-created catastrophe was about to occur, why they suddenly reversed their self-destructive efforts and manifested fear and unhappiness. He told himself, in excuse for coming down out of space, that perhaps this time he would discern some clue that had previously escaped him;

2

NICHOLS, accustomed now to his panic but still unable to control the trembling of

his hands, started to fasten his seat belt, then hesitated.

Resolutely, he refused to look at the briefcase at his feet; he knew he must not allow himself even the vain wish that he had sent his notes back with the various specimens and souvenirs he had collected in his six months on the Islands. He felt regret that the battered leather pouch, which had guarded the notes for his Master's thesis, would not be able to bring to term this latest child of his. He grimaced at the picture he had already enjoyed of himself reading the paper to an audience of fellow-anthropologists, told himself it was not that he feared dying but that he regretted the living he was being denied.

In self-disgust, Nichols stopped fumbling with his seat belt and walked past screaming, praying, fear-paralyzed passengers to the stewardess. Even at that dreadful moment, he had enough professional detachment to note that many of the loudest screamers were children of less than six, who could not possibly understand their danger. He reminded himself wryly of how much

emotion is accepted—without any understanding—as it is conveyed to us by creatures around-us.

The girl in the uniform had been pretty when he got on at Honolulu; now she was ugly with fear. "Please keep your seat," she said sharply.

Nichols didn't blame her. "Is there anything I can do?"

He was surprised she heard him; she didn't see him at all. "Yes. This woman is in shock. Finish strapping her, and see if you can bring her around." She moved toward the front of the plane and some of the small screamers.

NICHOLS sat on the next to the last seat, beside the limp, pale woman in the beige coat, and clumsily fastened her life preserver. She was not quite unconscious for her eyelids quivered and she moaned, "Andy. Andy. Forgive me."

Nichols took off his tortoiseshell-rimmed reading glasses and automatically put them in the case, then grimaced again for still wanting to believe that his life would continue. The Captain already told the passengers that the radio was

dead and that they were storm-tossed badly off course. The stewardess' face showed how much hope she felt.

He patted the woman's face gingerly. "Miss?" he said in an inquiring tone. There was an explosion louder than the lightning or thunder, as one of the engines caught fire.

A girl in back of him laughed out loud; and Nichols, sensing humor rather than hysteria, turned around in unbelief. She was Japanese in features, small and pretty, and her bright eyes gleamed mischief. "Give her a real whack," she advised. "It won't do her any harm, and it's the chance in a lifetime for your kind of guy to hit a lady."

Nichols smiled. "What do you know about my kind of guy?" He did increase the percussion of his blows against the woman's cheek.

The girl shrugged, looked slightly embarrassed. "You were doing some research on an island where I have some distant relatives." She sounded apologetic and defensive. "I don't blame you—they're a bunch of squares, wouldn't

know a buck if it climbed up on their lap and called 'em Momma—I don't understand 'em myself. But I like to go back and visit once in a while."

THE FERRET-LIKE dark man beside her, strapping his life preserver around a square-shaped bulge, sneered, "Big shot. Too big to talk to me when we first got on the plane. But you're still here in the soup just like..."

The second motor caught on fire with a crashing, tearing sound and the stepped-up bouncing and swooping of the plane cut off the rest of the tirade.

Nichols glanced out the window at the deceptively-smooth, green water racing toward them. At least here he had a better view than in the front. The woman beside him opened her eyes and muttered something about being sick.

The Japanese girl said scornfully to her seat mate, "What do you think you're going to do with that stuff in the middle of the Pacific? Use it for bait?"

The plane swooped and couldn't pull out of it, went

into a sustained dive. The storm crashed and the passengers quieted, knowing this was it.

3

ELBEZED thought he was safe in approaching them, for there was no other life or craft within hundreds of miles; and the creatures within the doomed ship were too obsessed with their imminent destruction to notice anything. The storm clouds were so thick as to be nearly solid, and the electrical charges that might reveal him were only occasional, and of brief duration.

He knew that, as Watcher, he was forbidden to intrude on human affairs, or to reveal his presence—though it was permissible, under rare circumstances to land in deserted places and sample different types of the physical reality that constituted this planet.

Nevertheless, Elbezede went closer than records showed any Njidian as having ever approached to any living Earth creature during the hundreds of years of their vigil. He sus-

pected that his term of Watch had made him a little insane, although he told himself that he wanted to make a notable contribution to Njidian lore on Earth people, and thus earn Conbezed's forgiveness and approval.

As Elbezed watched, the left front motor of the Earth aircraft exploded into flames. Minutes afterward, the second motor caught fire and exploded. The ship swooped and plunged erratically downward toward the glaucous green of the water below, where the main part broke in two. Broken bodies and equipment catapulted from the explosion of the wreck; some of the creatures floated on the raging waves, assisted in their buoyancy by pneumatic devices attached to their bodies.

SAFE IN the belief that his aircraft blended into the stormclouds, Elbezed came closer yet, trying to understand these creatures, which his people had been studying for hundreds of years. They seemed to have what was almost a passion for death; and yet—as surely as they made

thoughtful and elaborate preparation for it—when it came, they went through an almost convincing pretense of not being eager to die. He could not understand this; and he felt that it was important that he, that some Njidian should understand it.

If they were a death-oriented race, this yearning vigil of nearly a thousand years, while Earth people approached their maturity and became fit to mingle with the Njidians—or whoever else their stars ordained—was wasted. Even worse, then the only other inhabited planet which Njidia had been able to reach, the life form on which they had projected their fondest sentiment, the Earth creatures, would never become their companions. Elbezed felt his blood flow more slowly as he considered the most terrible result: when these creatures were able to travel among the stars, they would carry their germ of self-destruction with them. For the Njidians' own survival, they would be forced to destroy the only other intelligent life form they had so far discovered in the universe.

TWO SMALL boats floated on the plunging water. When they were not obscured by fog, Elbezed could see four Earth creatures in each of them; but he could not understand from their actions what was their intent.

He had watched more than one such catastrophe, and he knew from the past that they left many fellow creatures—who though non-viable in their present shattered condition would surely respond favorably to care—to remain permanently out of commission. It was one of the many proofs he had seen of their eagerness for death. Indeed, as Elbezed watched, one of the creatures in one boat heartlessly toppled one of the inert creatures out of his boat. Elbezed shook his head in hopeless puzzlement: it was not even a reasonable example of death eagerness, or death eagerness for a fellow creature, since the one who toppled it out of the boat had just finished laboriously dragging it back from a more distant position and pulling it into the boat.

Confusedly, Elbezed tried to reconcile what he saw with

what he knew. These who flew in aircraft usually considered themselves modern beings, and believed that they worshipped a good and creative God. These were not another, simpler kind of Earth creatures, whose undernourished bodies made desirable a Nirvana creed of frankly desiring non-existence. These were the intelligent ones, the ones who professed to love life and who were beginning their move toward the stars.

As he mused and listened to the storm noise he was horrified to see an Earth creature point toward his ship. The parting of the clouds, and a flash of lightning, had coincided to reveal his presence. All four of the creatures in the boat, the only one left now, stared upward at him and to his utter confusion, one rose in the flimsy construction and called to him, "Help us!"

None of his people had ever before been in such a position. No matter what he did now, he must break precedent and offend against customary behavior: no Njidian was supposed to interfere in anything that took place on Earth; and

yet, no Njidian could ever refuse a request for help. There was no solution.

II

NICHOLS, torn almost in two by his seat belt as the plane struck the water, tried to drive himself awake from an almost hypnotic lassitude. He couldn't afford to wait until the pain stopped. He freed himself, groaning, and then released the woman beside him.

Where the seat ahead of him had been, there was a jagged hole with a dizzying close-up of the ocean. The distance from the cabin floor and the top of the waves varied several feet, depending on whether they were on the upswell or the down.

The Japanese girl behind him was all right and freeing herself, and there was nothing but luggage across the aisle. Nichols dragged the sick woman out of her seat and over to the front of the plane, their wide-open, specially-made exit. She tried to cling to him there, but he tossed her into the fog-misted water.

He panted to the Japanese girl, "You coming?"

She adjusted her life preserver coolly. "Right now."

"And him?"

The girl didn't even look toward where the dark man was struggling out of the window seat. "Who cares?" She jumped into the green morass and struck out for the small boat only feet away.

The dark man followed her, and Nichols, regretting only his briefcase—which had been in the front of the plane, and was now either food for the fishes or ashes—followed him.

THE WOMAN kicked a little to help him and he guided her to the boat, where the girl helped him haul her in. The dark man flopped himself in, almost upsetting them; and then, in one of the frequent openings of the fog, Nichols spotted another passenger in the water.

It was one of the women he remembered as having children on board; and though she floated face down, she seemed all in one piece. The other boat, which they could see through the fog occasionally,

seemed to have at least as many passengers as they had.

Ironically, Nichols told himself it was hardly heroism; he had so little to lose. He yelled to the Japanese girl, "Try and hold the boat steady," he pointed. "I'll try and get her."

"Are you kidding?" she said, her smooth skin shiny gray in the pouring rain. "And if you get her, where do we put her?"

Nichols climbed over the edge while the girl leaned away from him to balance the boat. Once he was back in the water he was panic-stricken over whether he would be able to see the boat again in the fog. But he did get to the woman, and he did get back with her to the boat.

Again the girl helped him pull the woman up, and the fifth passenger lowered the boat so that water raced over the rounded edges.

The girl bent over the latest arrival for seconds. She said bitterly, "You knocked yourself out for nothing, Professor. She's dead."

Nichols stuck his cold-numbed, water-logged forefinger in the hollow of the

woman's throat, held it there as he watched the water rush perilously over their boat. When he was quite sure, he rolled her over the edge. The boat rose a couple of inches.

The girl looked fiercely toward the dark man. "There's more ballast we ought to get rid of..."

IN THE STORM, the screams weren't too noticeable; and when they did hear them they didn't at first understand what was happening. Then they realized that the passengers from the other boat were in the water, and something was wrong with the boat.

Nichols moved to take the oars from the girl and pull over to them. The boat wouldn't hold them but they could hang on, and stay together. He knew that none of them were really going anywhere, anyhow—so they might as well respect the amenities of proper behavior at a catastrophe.

The Japanese girl yanked the oars out of his hands and started pulling frantically in the opposite direction, away

from the threshing, roiling water.

He stared at her, she had seemed so cool during everything. He yelled over the storm, "You're going in the wrong direction."

Then he saw why the other boat had capsized and was sinking. There were three of the triangular fins circling around the boat; and when they disappeared for a moment, as the sharks rolled, he knew what was happening. Shuddering, Nichols even imagined he could see red in the green water.

He didn't blame the girl for not wanting to sacrifice them all uselessly. The people in the other boat didn't have a chance, nor would they themselves if the sharks felt like more meat.

At that moment the clouds parted both below and above, like a theater curtain and they saw it hovering there, silent, ominous. Nichols, the woman, the dark man and the Japanese girl all saw it at the same moment.

"Well," said the girl, her teeth chattering, "at least now

we know there are such things."

Nichols saw it but he refused to believe it, telling himself it was some trick of his fear-crazed, exhausted mind.

The woman rose suddenly, almost falling into the water. She reached out her arms. "Help us!" she screamed. "Help us!"

The dark man, looking upward at the weird craft, huddled his arms protectively around something hidden under his ocean-logged coat.

2

ELBEZED gazed back at the people who had just sighted him with fear and consternation. That they had seen him was not too disturbing. From time to time, people saw one of the Watchers, but they never really believed it.

The reason was the same one that in earlier eras had required them to execute many of their savants. As in the case of Copernicus, for example, they preferred to ignore a reality that was less flattering than another more familiar and desirable construction. So he was

not alarmed at having been seen, although it was the sort of thing a competent Watcher avoided.

What alarmed him was that they expected him to do something. That was an entirely more serious problem, since no mature Njidian ever ignored his duties—except, Elbezed reminded himself sorrowfully, a sinner like himself, who then heartily regretted his defection.

Elbezed returned to the moral problem here, as an escape from his more painful personal problem. These people wanted help from him but the rule for Watchers had always been: hands off. Death was a natural phenomenon, for Earth creatures and Njidians, and Watchers were not supposed to interfere with nature, except in their own civilization.

He considered his previous hope of making a contribution to their lore on these, their baby brothers, and thus winning Conbezed's approval. This could be his opportunity.

THE CREATURES in the boat were well aware that they were about to be put per-

manently out of commission by either the carnivorous sea killers, or by the storm—or, slowly and more painfully, by their uncharted distance from possible succor.

What harm could it do, Elbezed wondered recklessly, if he picked them up, communicated with them, and then returned them exactly to where he had found them? If he wanted to be an absolute stickler for precisely controlled conditions, he could even wait for a parallel weather situation to return them.

It was not quite the Hands Off policy; but without some personal communication it would be many weary eons before these complex creatures, their little brothers, established themselves as safe and fit to overspread the universe. Elbezed forced himself to conclude the thought: or before Njidians knew certainly that their brothers had such dangerously self-destructive tendencies that when they were about to break out of their quarantine and travel the stars, they would have to be destroyed, for Njidia's own security.

Once, he had decided, Elbezed lowered the craft to just above their boat.

3

INCREDULOUSLY, Nichols watched the gleaming ladder slide smoothly down from the gaping hole just above them. He tried to conceive of the skill and power it must take to hold such a craft in that storm steady exactly over their plunging boat. He decided it was physically impossible and that he wasn't seeing it.

The Japanese girl nudged him, pointed to the other two, climbing the ladder. "Are you coming, or would you rather be alone?" It was quieter under the cover and she didn't have to yell.

He gazed upward at the craft that now sheltered them from the rain. "It's just an illusion. "

"Well, it's a dry illusion," she said, and started up the ladder.

Nichols, stubbornly staring down at the boat, now riding much higher with all the passengers out except himself,

realized that it was an extremely logical illusion.

Elbezed, pilot-stabilized over the boat, and using an affinity for the electro-magnetic force given out by the creatures as his anchor, stood at the opening to his ship. His appearance, he knew, was sufficiently humanoid not to alarm his guests. His broader circumference and slightly shorter height made him appear, if anything, harmless and genial.

He called down to the last one, "Do you wish to come along?"

Nichols shook his head helplessly and gazed out over what he could see of the deadly extent of the ocean surrounding him. Strain and fear had, of course, sent him off his rocker, but even a pleasant illusion was preferable to such reality. He went along.

ELBEZED contacted the controls, and the ladder retracted: the ship sealed itself and moved back into its orbit of Watch.

Nichols glanced around the large circular room, with its full balcony ten feet above the resilient pink floor on which

he and the three others stood dripping.

Elbezed, studying them, sensed with pain that they thought he had rescued them. Even the suggestion of a lie humiliated him; but he knew, too, that disabusing them of their desired belief would only ease his own conscience. It would make them feel worse.

To put off any decision, he gestured toward the pale blue, homespun cloth rompers he wore. "Call me Elbezed," he suggested. "And since our shape and dimensions are not too dissimilar, would you care to change into such clothing as this?"

The woman, who had been drooping like a rose in the driving rain, now straightened slightly, and looked feminine and eager. "I'd love to get these wet things off."

The Japanese girl shrugged. "It beats pneumonia," she said.

Elbezed brought garments and passed them out. He indicated the stairs to the balcony, which he had just traversed. "Take any room, it will then be yours for the duration of your stay."

THE WORDS rang ominously in Nichols' ears and he felt fear of the small, apparently agreeable creature. "Wait! Let's not get separated. Let's all stay together—and first let's find out who this man is and what he's doing here."

The dark man scowled. "Pulling us out of the drink. That's good enough for me." He held his blue garment and still sought to conceal the object under his coat.

Elbezed said tentatively, "I might be testing some top-secret defensive-aggressive invention for the authorities. "

The four looked at him with hope and doubt.

Nichols said insistently, "Then you're going to land us safely?"

Elbezed, who in twenty years of observation, had learned many of their ways, sighed. "I can't do that."

"You see?" Nichols demanded of the others in triumph and horror. "There's something wrong about this."

The woman was back in panic again. "What are you going to do with us?"

Elbezed said reluctantly, "I

mean you no harm. Believe that."

The Japanese girl said practically, "What could we do anyway? That's good enough for me." She headed for the stairway and the woman and man followed her.

Nichols stayed behind. "How can they walk like that? So easily, without lurching."

Elbezed knew there would be no danger in answering any questions; it would make no difference. "We're beyond the reach of Earth gravity; so a small gravity-mass holds the inner ship constant, no matter what gyrations the outer shell go through."

Nichols knew it sounded insane, but he said it. "You're not from Earth, are you?"

ELBEZED hesitated only for a moment. Again, it could make no difference. "I'm from the sphere Njidia, although that is not what your astronomers call it."

Dazedly, Nichols watched the puddles where they had stood steam gently and grow smaller. He tried to pull himself together. "What do you want from us?"

Elbezed tried to open his mind to the man, to permit him to see exactly what their attitude was. Since he had gone this far beyond custom and morality, no further harm could result from an honest meeting. If the Earth people were resolute in their self-destruction, why should the Watchers wait so patiently through the centuries for a development that would never occur? It was better to know the truth, no matter how disappointing.

He said carefully, "I want only to become better acquainted with the people of Earth. Do you object?"

"But why?"

Elbezed resented the creature's fear. Of him! "There is no evil, as you know evil, in Njidians. You need not fear us."

Nicky caught his meaning. "But *you* fear *us*?" He sounded as incredulous as he felt. People from another sphere, coming to Earth—and being afraid of humans. It didn't make sense.

Elbezed said simply, "Don't you fear each other?"

Nichols stared at him in

shock, and shame. Elbezed was right; humans did fear each other. It was not so insane that non-humans should fear them too. Nichols scrabbled for some of his self-respect. "I'm an anthropologist, a student of man. What you say is true, but not of all men..."

- "I'm a student of man, too." Elbezed did not add, *And have been for twenty years.* He finished, "When you're more comfortable, it will be good to compare information."

III

NICHOLS' room was small and functional, circular on the outer edge, to conform to the shape of the ship. There was a cushioned platform for resting, a lounge chair, and a worktable and chair. There was a cabinet for holding garments and an adjoining cubicle with sanitary equipment.

Nichols showered, scrubbing the salt water from his chilled flesh and revelling in the sensation of warmth. Dressed in the blue romper, which felt a little like a loose gym suit, he was

more resigned but not cheerful. Elbezed had admitted that he did not propose to land them safely. Their situation in the boat had been sure death; but here, Nichols felt they were little better off.

He took from his suit, which although heavy with salt, was beginning to dry, his aluminum cigaret case. The case had kept most of the water out, and he took a cigaret, wishing that the romper had pockets. No pockets alone, Nichols thought wryly, was sufficient proof that Elbezed was truly not of Earth.

A small light flashed on in the wall and Nichols recognized Elbezed's voice coming from a grill beside it. "You may wish to rest, after your painful experience. Please do not hesitate, if you like, to lie down and sleep."

Nichols frowned and yawned. The repetition suggested hypnosis and he refused to be affected, but he still found himself dropping down on the cushioned platform. That, at least, could do no harm since he was very tired. His last thought was that he did not intend to sleep while Elbezed was up to God-knew-what. Then he slept.

ELBEZED knew he was in for it. He opened the door to the most likely of his prospects, the young man who most feared him. If he could not discover some new, definitive concept about these people, he would go down in history as a self-willed, disobedient, anti-social maniac; and young Njidi-ans would be badgered into good behavior by threatening references to his name. Already he regretted his wild impulse.

Nichols opened his eyes and blinked at Elbezede.

Elbezede suggested, "Food? Coffee?"

In the small, cozy galley, seated across from each other they both drank of the beverage. It was, of course, a chemical approximation of coffee; but Elbezede could see Nichols approved of it.

Elbezede said, "Tell me about yourself."

Nichols toyed with the cup. He said suddenly, "Tell me what your game is, and I'll know how much you can safely be told."

Elbezede smiled, both to manifest friendliness and because the man's suspicion was so

ridiculous. "Come see my ship," he suggested.

It was shaped, as Nichols knew from having seen the outside of it, like a large, squat top. The main central room was edged by a balcony halfway up to the roof; and the balcony served the smaller rooms, such as the survivors had been given, and the galley where Elbezede and he had eaten.

The colors used in walls and floors and ceiling were largely delicate pastels, with an occasional vivid tone to keep the decor from being insipid. But nowhere did Nichols see any machinery.

He asked, "What does it use for power, and where are the controls?"

ELBEZED looked at Nichols soberly. "Your people have not yet begun to develop our power source creatively; I will not harm you by telling you of what you are not yet ready for. And I must warn you that what you conceive of as mechanical controls are actually nothing more than a sort of radio wave that permeates every portion of the ship and operates only by my own brain wave length. It

will respond to no other."

"You *think* it into action?" Nichols stared at him. "I don't believe it. What if you change your mind?"

"The ship changes its course."

"And—if you die?" Nichols nervously tried for sarcasm. "Or maybe Njidians don't die?"

Elbezed said simply, "Certainly we die—after a couple of hundred years. But when I go out of commission, there is no further use for my craft. So it atomizes itself." He didn't explain the obvious: that otherwise, Earth creatures might get hold of one of the Watchers' ships.

He smiled at Nichols. "Stop thinking of how to put me out of commission. It would change nothing. Instead," he begged, "help me to understand Earth people." He didn't add, *So Njidians may fairly hope for the solace of company in this lonely universe, and so they need not dread corruption by your self-destructive tendencies.*

THEY HAD arrived back at Nichols' room. In response

to a gesture of invitation, Nichols lay down on the resting platform, and watched Elbezed take the chair opposite him.

Nichols said, "That was hypnosis before, wasn't it?"

Elbezed said, "You were all very upset. It was as harmless as a visit to one of your churches. Do you object?"

"No. But since you're so good at it, why not use hypnosis to obtain whatever information you want?"

"A mind," Elbezed said painstakingly, "even a human mind is too delicate. . . You understand that the tiniest nuclei can never be seen as they genuinely are—that the energy charge necessary for vision inevitably alters their original condition?"

Nichols frowned, nodded his head slowly.

"So the effect of one mind on another," Elbezed said. "As an anthropologist, you must know that your mere presence in a group of more primitive people tends in some degree to alter their way of life, no matter how you try to maintain them unchanged for your study. You can never see the people as they would have been, were

you, a strange, outside force, not there."

Again, Nichols nodded reluctantly.

Elbezed sighed. "That is why I desire that you of your free will give me your confidence—to prize information from your mind would be to alter it." Elbezed wished wistfully that Njidians had not been guided for so many plodding centuries of pure reason that the ancient gift of instinct was now dead. He would have to pay scrupulous attention to any possible clue, strive to comprehend more intelligently than any of his people had yet, and hope that luck was on his side.

Nichols said, "What do you want to know?"

ELBEZED considered the many centuries that Watchers had studied this small and pugnacious planet. They had focussed on man, Earth's highest life form; and on the basis of the long and painful development of Njidia's own evolving civilization, they had sought to project which way Earth would go.

Elbezed asked obliquely, "Why do so many of your peo-

ple who are salvageable choose permanent non-commission?"

"I don't understand."

"Those people you left in the water during the recent malfunction of your aircraft. The woman. Why didn't you salvage more of them?"

Nichols frowned at him. "They were dead."

Elbezed said patiently, "Yes, I saw they were temporarily out of commission. But you people rarely do salvage such cases."

Nichols shook his head. "What can you do if a woman's heart stops? Or if a man is half-consumed by a shark?"

Elbezed said, "Njidians are less fragile."

"Well, we aren't."

Elbezed felt as depressed as his guest was angry. There was no meeting of minds between them. He knew every recent slang phrase of every language group on earth; yet he couldn't really understand, or be understood, by this educated member of one of the most civilized nations. How could he achieve the firm conclusion he needed to appease Conbezed's disapproval of him. And how Conbezed would disapprove when

he learned of his newest transgression, this breach of Hands Off policy.

HE TRIED a more direct tack. "Tell me how we Njidiens can help Earth cease this self-destructive pattern your people persist in. In return," Elbezé promised recklessly, "you will be made wealthy, powerful, wise and good beyond your profoundest longings."

Nichols laughed out loud. "That's easy. Leave us alone—and for my reward—leave me alone."

Elbezé winced. His most splendid offer spurned, he sensed defeat. "Don't you care for the good of your people? Do you desire to see them destroy themselves?"

Nichols stopped laughing. "That's below the belt," he admitted. "But I know enough not to try to skip a grade in the cultural progression. You can't do it."

Elbezé tempted, "Our life span is 200 years." He gestured around the ship. "This should give you some idea of our cultural development. All yours,

if you will admit your aim is destruction..."

Nichols showed his anger. "It only looks like... You just don't understand..." He broke off, realizing that he didn't understand either. Yet he knew that he was not striving to destroy either himself or the race. He finished, "No dice."

After a long silence, Elbezé said sadly, "You want to know why we have sent out Watchers for so many centuries. It is because we fear your intelligence combined with your strange sickness. Either alone would constitute no threat; together they menace us, your nearest star-neighbor."

He watched Nichols flush. "You are ashamed," he observed regretfully. "And we are afraid." Wasteful, undignified emotions, not suited to living creatures seeking to emulate their God.

Nichols spoke brazenly, to cover his humiliation. "What stops you from destroying us—before we contaminate you?"

ELBEZÉ'S round face manifested his shock. "We did not create you. How dare we destroy you?" He did not add,

Unless we are quite convinced it is essential for our own survival. He did not say, And I am trying to discern if it is essential.

Elbezed added with open yearning, "Anyway, you are the only planet we have found in thousands of years producing a life form that in any way resembles ours. We regard you as a relative."

Nichols jeered, "A poor relative."

Elbezed said soberly, "A mad relative. And madness is contagious, even across the stars. So we watch." He looked at Nichols. The man had answered him, but not directly. He knew his people were sick, but he was afraid to admit it. A poor scientist, to be so controlled by emotion; no wonder their wisdom came so slowly.

Nichols slept, and Elbezed tried to cheer himself. The others would be less confused by their half-comprehended education. They should be more wholesomely greedy, more honestly self-seeking.

He would try the woman next. She was in the throes of some powerful guilt-complex,

quite as painful as his own; this internal pressure should make her more amenable to his needs.

Across from her in the galley, again he probed for the limit of integrity of one of these strange creatures.

"You understand, Mrs. Kempton, I desire the good of your people. You understand, too, my power to help you—both individually and en masse—is almost unlimited..."

LILA KEMPTON shoved the full sleeves of her blue romper higher on her shapely arms and enjoyed the comfort of coffee. The blue was not unbecoming, though the voluminous folds of the garment were a far cry from the snugly fitted clothes she chose to emphasize her womanly charms.

She nodded solemnly at what the creature had just said. She believed him—or it, whichever it was. She wondered whether it was susceptible to feminine charm and made her eyes large and helpless as she gazed at it.

Elbezed said, "I can explain and justify—to you, the least reasonable of all courts of final

resort—your recent act against your husband.”

Lila sat up startled, while fear altered the carefully-portrayed sweetness on her face. “What do you know about me?” She tried to think *Andy wouldn't believe what some nasty-minded other-world creature told him*. But she knew what Elbezed meant: her own conscience would give her away, even if nothing else did.

“Your particular cultural milieu demands the appearance of monagamous love,” Elbezed pointed out unnecessarily. “You committed an indiscretion while under the influence of the geographically conducive atmosphere. Not your fault,” he said hastily, “but you believe it is.” He looked at her. “I can exorcise your mind of the shame...”

Lila stopped the pretense of ignorance that left him unaffected, and practically considered his suggestion. Her own guilt would surely be the clue that would hand her over to Andy's puritanical contempt. This was her first sin, but it would still bring about the end of a secure and honorable mar-

riage. She dreaded the loss of both the security and the honor: her paramour had been pleasant, but she knew well that a good provider of tolerable social habits, like Andy, was not readily found.

She asked thoughtfully, “Just what do you want from me?”

“Your honest opinion, not withheld, not forced. Can anything stop mankind from destroying itself?”

LILA STARED at him, her eyes large, and this time not through artfulness. This other-world creature was suddenly revealing to her why Andy was so often nervous and irascible, and why she was always dreaming of some delightful experience that would give her life meaning—make it worthwhile to live and die.

Elbezed was saying that everybody was just as mixed-up and unhappy as she. Mankind was making such frenzied efforts to material progress so that he need not begin the more difficult job of spiritual progress; but within himself he did notice, no matter how fast he ran. But just because they were not growing spiritually stronger

now didn't mean they couldn't or wouldn't. Vaguely and emotionally, she understood him.

"Andy will understand what I did," she said scornfully. "He'll forgive me." It was a lie, but not to save her marriage could she admit that they were doomed. She repudiated Elbezed's accusation because instinctively she felt that to admit it would be to make it true.

Elbezed looked at her in disbelief. He already knew her thought, but he wanted to hear it stated flatly and without pressure:—that this civilization was too sick to endure and should, for its own relief, be given surcease.

It would at once obviate the need of keeping Watch and minimize the ultimate disappointment of discovering that the Earth creatures were not their little brothers. Best of all, it would permit Elbezed to stop his tiresome Watch and go home, a hero, to posterity.

But if they would not confess themselves lost, if even this shallow and ignorant woman refused to spring his trap,

then he knew Njidia would not condone their destruction.

Elbezed pointed out, "Your people are obviously making every effort to destroy themselves. It's just a question of time until they do." He hinted invitingly, "Unless someone of courage and vision sees the problem and does something."

She ignored the hook, glared at him. "We're learning all the time. Just wait. You'll see..."

IV

ELBEZED was not at all secure when he confronted the dark man, still he was not hopeless. It was true that his type of reasoning was most likely to work on the professor, or at least on the guilt-stricken woman. But this man, too, was deeply interested in self-aggrandizement. He had gone to much trouble and effort to save the drugs and weapon he thought were concealed in the folds of his garment.

Elbezed gave him food and tried to discern what the sick creature wanted. After proving his power, and explaining his

desire, he finished, "So why should you not admit that the people of your star are sick and self-destructive.. " He pointed to the bulge in Armand's romper, half-visible behind the table. "You would not pander to their weakness if you hoped they had any salvage value."

Armand's face contorted and he withdrew his gun. "You scare me," he said, and shot Elbezed through the stomach from a distance of three feet.

Elbezed chided, "That is foolish. Please stop." He shoved the muzzle of the gun away.

Unbelievably, Armand stared at the hole, tinged with pale pink moistness, in the center of Elbezed's garment. He switched his stare to the smoking automatic. "The water," he said stupidly. "The water must have done something to it."

Elbezed ignored the wound, which was small enough to take care of itself anyway. He saw a chance to make his point. "The weapon is as effective as ever," he said. "We have simply learned to be more durable." He rose, and exhibited his wound to Armand for proof.

Armand turned green as the ocean in an overcast.

Elbezed said quickly, "I can make you as durable if you like." He gestured toward the package Armand still kept. "And that. You do it for money. I can see that you have as much money as you want. Think of it!"

Armand, his mouth tight with nausea, was silent.

HIS SILENCE frightened Elbezed, who was running low on hope. He offered what he knew was a staggering temptation. "I'll even take you back with me to Njidia to live out your span. You, alone, of the Earth will finish out your natural life. Admit that Earth people are dedicated to destruction!"

Armand stared down at the faintly smoking automatic. "I suppose your people don't have no vices, no policemen, nothing like that?"

"Nothing like that. Our greatest crime," Elbezed's face darkened with the memory, "is not to be a responsible member of our group. Our greatest punishment is at the same time a reward—a chance to do

something admirable and redeem ourselves..."

Armand shook his head. "I wouldn't like it." His face assumed a look of grim resolution. He shoved the gun toward Elbezed, raised his chin. "You can let me have it. Now."

Elbezed stared at him with real fear. Even this vicious and depraved creature refused to condemn his fellows—verbally. In every way they sacrificed their own kind—with vice and automobile accidents, by small dishonesties and through planet-wide war, but not in words.

ELBEZED faced the Japanese girl, aware that only she stood between him and Conbezed's contempt. "Kazui, you have every right to feel disgust and anger toward your fellow man." He watched her dunk a doughnut, and emulated her action, courteously eating the soggy mixture. "You've had a bad deal."

The girl stared at him, still daintily masticating. She swallowed. "Huh?"

"As member of a minority group," Elbezed explained.

"The innocent being held responsible along with the guilty; they shoved you around."

She looked at him pityingly. "I work for an outfit that packs six per cent of all the catsup consumed on earth. That's a lot of catsup, friend, and nobody shoves me around."

Elbezed was mystified; but he had a sinking feeling she was not particularly interested in his sympathy with her as a member of a minority group.

She explained, "It's a big company. We're a big outfit, and I help. You know, cog in the wheel. "

"While they need you, yes. But what about when they didn't? What about a while back, your innocent fellow Japanese segregated?"

She was not angry. "I'm American, friend. That was a mess, all right; but nobody got fatally killed just from being segregated."

"But the injustice!"

She shrugged. "You take your chances. You know, like on the plane." Her face darkened. "You can't beat every percentage; but if you want to live, you have to try..."

SHE WAS turning him down. Without even having asked her, he knew what her answer would be. Elbezed upped the prize. "Kazui," he said pleadingly, "Listen. The philosophy of your ancestors must have some appeal to you. We have achieved the serenity they sought. We have found the Way, Kazui, truly. You are welcome to come along. "

She looked at him with less than ecstasy. "Sure I've heard something of that old sit-still and do-nothing jive. " She looked at him with some fear. "You mean and not work any more for Rawlin's Products—Everything From Tomatoes?"

Elbezed said impressively, "You'd have to give up Rawlins, but you would spend the rest of your life contemplating perfection. "

Kazui said uneasily. "What do you want from my life, anyway?"

"Admit that the people of earth want destruction—each their own, and that of every other creature they can reach!"

Kazui said, "We're liable to up it to eight per cent, this year." Her bright slanted eyes pierced Elbezed like spears.

"Eight per cent of all the tomato catsup consumed on Earth. On Earth," she repeated with complacency.

Elbezed closed his eyes. Four times he had tried; four times he had lost. But he had been too sure that one of the others would break; he had not plumbed Nichols completely. He would make one more try.

AWAKENING the man, Elbezed knew that this time he must not fail. He no longer pretended to himself that his investigation was unprejudiced; it was not. He knew now that even evidence, agreement with his conclusion, out of the mouth of an Earth creature was not essential.

Only the destruction of this planet would resolve the processes he had set in motion and bury his error of intervention. For a moment, Elbezed, aware of his prejudice and of his intensity, knew that he must be insane. For that moment, he felt the same shock and shame that Nichols had manifested when suddenly confronted with the stupidity of his own kind.

Elbezed knew that if he was insane, any decision would be

an error; and this was a decision so important that generations of Njidiens had passed it forward, rather than risk such an error. He put the thought from his mind; Earth was sick, not he.

Nichols, awakening and seeing Elbezed, showed fear and anger.

Elbezed said bluntly, "Your companions—the unfaithful woman, the purveyor of vice and the tomato Rotarian—share your noble conviction. They do not feel that earth people are necessarily self-destructive."

Nichols' face relaxed.

Elbezed finished, "So the Watch will have to be continued." His lie told him again of his urgency and his madness.

Nichols said, "What do you mean?"

"If we knew certainly you would destroy yourself, why continue the Watch? We could go home."

Nichols looked at him. "Why were you chosen? For the job of Watcher?"

ELBEZED felt the pain of remembering. "I evaded a duty. As punishment, and to

enable me to redeem myself, I was permitted to take over fifty years of the Watch. Customarily it is an honor, awarded to the most deserving of the volunteers."

Nichols frowned at him. "How long have you been—on Watch?"

"Twenty years. Elbezed suspected that he was weary of it. It was even possible that his thought of intervening to please Conbezed was a trick of his mind, that what he really wanted was to terminate his long servitude. How terrible, if he were destroying their only companions in the wide and lonely universe, merely because he was sick. He put the thought from his mind quickly.

Nichols said thoughtfully, "And if one of us had said we were self-destructive, you would have gone home. Really?"

Elbezed was becoming hardened to lies and dissembling. "Why not?"

Nichols continued to look at him, without speaking.

Elbezed spoke with crafty regret. "I had hoped that you, a scientist, would have had the courage to speak the truth, for

we both know it is the truth."

Nichols was not satisfied. "How long will this Watch keep up?"

Elbezed shrugged. "Until we knew definitely whether or not you constitute a threat to us. A policeman is supposed to keep one creature from destroying another. We were willing to act as a policeman. We are not God, however; and only God can keep a creature from destroying himself."

Elbezed went on, "We both know that your society is death-oriented, so there is no need to destroy you, no need to waste our time at Watch. As a cancer destroys its host, you will surely eradicate yourselves."

Nichols asked, as Elbezed wanted him to, "Unless?"

ELBEZED shrugged again, with pretended disinterest. "You asked about our source of power. It may give you the slight edge you need to save yourselves. To stop trying, with such dedication, to die. To start trying to live. . ."

Elbezed wondered if Nichols would accept his deadly gift. For, to arrive at a knowl-

edge before the mind is properly prepared for that knowledge would not help the creatures to escape their doom; it would assure it. The information he had in mind for Nichols would lead to experiments that would send the Earth into the sun.

"Tell me," said Nichols.

Carefully, deliberately, Elbezed prepared Nichols as a living bomb to rid space of the sick and corrupt planet.

His instructions completed, Elbezed improvised a collapsible boat similar to that his passengers had been in when he found them. Then he awakened the other three members of the group.

He moved out of space in order to put them down on the same ocean in which he had found them, but where they would surely intercept the path of an oncoming ship and be rescued.

IT WAS NOT until Elbezed, watching out of a small control panel, saw that he was very close to the green splash that was the Pacific Ocean, that he noticed his ship was behaving peculiarly.

No Njidian craft ever failed, their mechanics were too simple; he knew it must be his own deranged mind that was failing, giving incorrect orders. He wondered, with a sense of doom and irony, whether it was possible for sick Earth to have infected him while he was on Watch—whether the germ of insanity could have leaped across space.

There was no doubt about it: the craft was not handling correctly because its pilot was no longer sane. Elbezed knew that Conbezed would say that the sickness was in him when he left Njidia, that it had merely seemed to flower as the result of his Watch.

But Conbezed would be wrong. With relief Elbezed realized that, even if he was about to die before his proper span was accomplished, at least he had insured the eradication of the trouble breeder. Earth would destroy no more—no more of its own, and no more Njidians.

The circular craft moved unsteadily downward, and at the proper location to surely intercept the oncoming ship, as yet out of sight, Elbezed hovered.

Through mental command, as was the only way the machinery could respond, Elbezed opened the hatch, with some difficulty. He tossed down the boat. The ladder, at his command, moved down but unsteadily.

LILA, ARMAND and Kazui, dressed in their own clothes and with their own life preservers over them, clambered down toward the water below, and then jumped.

For a moment Elbezed felt very strange; and when the ship trembled, he knew he had caused it to do so. The others were already safely away from his craft, but Nichols was the important one—the one who must live.

Nichols hung back, looking at him oddly. "You weren't going to land us safely before," he remembered. "What made you change your mind?"

"Quick!" Elbezed shoved him toward the ladder, trying to force him through the hatch. "Something's going to happen! Get out!"

Nichols was barely out before the top-shaped craft moved gently down the short

distance toward the water, touched its surface and kept on moving downward. It continued to move, slowly but steadily downward. Elbezed was unable to close the hatch, but the air trapped inside the globe kept the water out at first.

As the ship sank deeper, the curved walls made strange echoing sounds and began to buckle. Elbezed was not too disturbed. Even if Nichols had not gotten completely clear of the ship, the rounded shape of the craft could not possibly trap him, and his life preserver would force him to safety and the surface. Elbezed knew Nichols would live.

Elbezed's satisfaction was interrupted when the seamless sphere crumpled inward and flattened him like a fly caught between a pair of cymbals. He was immobilized but he was not put out of commission so

easily; crushed between the walls, and watching the water rise, Elbezed wondered suddenly whether his madness had been afflicting him when he had given Nichols the deadly information.

He was suddenly terribly afraid that it had; and if it had, his precious trap would fail. With horror, Elbezed realized that now there was no way to warn his people that the dread disease of these innocent, ignorant killers was communicable even over a great distance—that henceforth, the *Watchers*, too, must be watched.

It was a terrible thought; and because Njidians were so durable, Elbezed had a terribly long time to consider it before, finally, to his infinite relief, he and the ship simultaneously disintegrated.



Coming Next Month

THE DESTROYERS

A Powerful Novelet

by Theodore L. Thomas



WINDOWS ON IGNORANCE

ONE OF THE silliest notions that we've heard recently is the contention that the advent of *sputnik*, and the opening of the "age of space" has dealt a mortal blow to science fiction. It belongs in the file with the statement of that patent office employee, last century, who resigned his commission because he was sure that all possible inventions had been made, and that shortly there would be no need for a patent office. It is further indication of the number of seemingly-

educated people who not only do not know what science fiction is, but do not know what science is.

Behind this, of course, lurks the very understandable feeling on the part of many that scientists should take a long vacation because (a) we know just about all we can possibly know, or (b) we know all we *need* to know, or (c) we know all that it's *safe* to know—and a lot that isn't safe to know. You've seen variations on all of these themes in science fiction magazines and books, in

stories by writers who do not like science, don't understand science, and/or are deathly afraid of science.

I'M INCLINED to doubt whether there's been a generation in recorded history—and certainly within the last few centuries—when these contentions haven't come up. Let's look them over a bit.

We know just about all we can possibly know. This can be dismissed rather quickly; as it is not met with so frequently these days, and has little weight where it is encountered. Much more serious is:

We know all that we need to know. First of all, if the brief reign that General Semantics had in certain areas of science fiction produced any worth-while results, these lay in demonstrating to an unspecified number of science fictionists (and others) that no one does, or can, possibly know *all* about anything whatsoever. And that when someone says, "I know all about that", what he is really saying is, "You can't tell me anything about that." In effect, such a person

is declaring that he *will not* learn any more about the subject under discussion. He's announcing that he has locked the door and closed all the windows to any possible information which he may not have on the subject. (He doesn't believe it exists.) This is largely subconscious, it goes without saying, in most instances. The person who claims "all knowledge" of subject doesn't realize what he is saying when he makes such a claim, or what his attitude is doing.

But it is possible, at a particular time, to say, "I know all I need to know" about a subject when this means "Granted that there is more to be learned, I can do this particular job now on the basis of what I know; it isn't necessary to wait for further information." Obviously, no doctor can spend a lifetime waiting for further information before treating a slashed artery; no plumber can hold out for new discoveries while a burst pipe is spouting water. Tomorrow, next week, next month, perhaps new data will show how

he could have done it better; but a lot of things have to be done as well as we can do them right now.

THEN THERE'S the matter of disrupting your organization. If I have worked out a neat, efficient, and profitable way of refurbishing foithboinders, then a radical new process which would require me to re-organize from end to end isn't going to look very attractive. I "know all I need to know" about the job, and its paying very nicely, curse you!

From the religious and ethical point of view (I separate the two to indicate the difference between the dictum that Man can work out his salvation—here and hereafter—only under God, and the dictum, more common to our times, that Man is perfectible by his own effort alone, and does not need any higher source—hereafter being myth) it may be said that we do "know all we need to know" in order to live the "good life". But, except for the instance of certain types of fanatic, neither the religious nor the ethical view-

point would make that statement absolutely.

For the religious man, knowledge—in and of itself—is neither "good" nor "evil", but rather it is the use to which knowledge is put that makes it so. Whatever God does not want Man to know, then, He has made entirely impossible for Man to discover—either forever, or at particular times. The very fact that Man *has* discovered this or that is proof that God did not intend that Man should never know this. The ethical viewpoint, lacking faith, is more likely to fear Man's entry into "forbidden knowledge"—e x c e p t, of course, such a viewpoint does not recognize anything to "forbid" it.

HOWEVER, there's a difference between having a store of data in one's head and "knowledge". Data which are not used might as well not be available. Recall the parable of the foolish man who built his house upon sand (or without foundation, on the surface of the ground, as another translation puts it)—this is the parable Jesus used to illustrate

the plight of those who have the data at hand, but do not use them.

Thus, from the religious man's viewpoint, we have had the data necessary to protect us from the misuse of scientific discoveries for nearly two thousand years; and the reason why the world is in a dreadful state, hovering on the edge of cataclysm, is not because some wicked scientists learned how to fission the atom, but because willful laymen—who did not and do not realize that all authority comes from God for His service—have used discoveries to serve themselves. The ethical viewpoint is similar except, of course, it admits no higher source of good than Man himself.

We have the data, but we do not *know* all we need to know—so long as we do not use it, we don't "know" it. (The knowledge includes realization of its necessity for use.)

We know all that it's safe to know. Those who state this assume that we *would* be "safe" if certain discoveries had not been made. But there's no getting around the fact that

a good deal of data isn't "safe"—because it's incomplete. In the phrase, "a little knowledge is a dangerous thing"—the stress should not fall on "knowledge" but "little".

THUS, WHILE every scientific discovery opens a window on knowledge, it opens a larger, more expansive window on ignorance. And that process is by no means safe! It isn't safe because of the widespread human tendency to think we know all we need to know, when we know just enough to get ourselves into a jam. Because any new discovery is likely to help us assure ourselves that we now have the easy answer to everything.

Safety measures can, of course, be legislated and enforced to a certain extent; *safety* cannot. Even if every person alive were a policeman watching every other person, safety would still not be guaranteed. Even breeding curiosity out of the race (as has been suggested in some stories) wouldn't do it—because curiosity (which is the root of scientific inquiry) is also a safe-

ty factor. Without it, we'd be as safe as a rabbit in the wild.

Want to set the clock back? How far? It'll start moving forward again, anyway. Want to stop the clock? No need for that. It'll happen of itself eventually—maybe soon.

Science fiction—good science fiction—looks out of those windows on ignorance that are being opened all the time, and scouts around amongst the data “known” but not applied. To a certain ex-

tent, all literature does—but good science fiction tries to picture what might happen if some of the non-applied were put into effect.

Those windows into space merely confirm what has been “known” for centuries—that we know very little, and that little shows itself as more dangerous daily in the hands of men who are satisfied that they do not need to know any more.

R. A. W. L.



The Reckoning



In the May issue, we asked three questions of you, our readers: “Do you approve of monthly publication?”, “Shall we continue to use serial novels?”, and “Do you like the type of article in this issue?”

Your answer to all three questions was an overwhelming YES.

Fine — but we want to be sure that those of you who voted represent the wishes of the majority. We can be sure, if we continue to receive letters, coupons, and postal-cards, and the consensus remains the same. *So . . . keep those ballots coming our way; send in your vote today.*

Your votes on the May contents added up this way:

1. The Tower of Zanid (pt. 1)	1.37
2. Postman's Holiday	2.16
3. Satellites in Fact & Fiction	2.60
4. Research Team	3.66
5. Invasion Vanguard	4.00
6. The Logical Life	4.16

We sneaked the article into the coupon without saying anything about how you should rate it. Looks as if it stood up rather well, doesn't it?

the four

by CALVIN M. KNOX

**Mary Foyle was a rebel,
intent on exploring forbidden
areas. Only . . . she
wanted to be caught!**

MORE THAN a mile of dark sea-water roofed the city. It lay off the Atlantic coast of North America, nestling beneath the waves, cradled by hundreds of atmospheres of pressure. In the official records, the city's designation was Undersea Refuge PL-12. But the official records, like the rest of the landside world, lay blasted and shattered, and the people of Undersea Refuge PL-12 called their city New Baltimore. Eleven thousand was New Baltimore's population, a figure set by long-dead landside authorities and maintained by rigorous policies of control.

The history of New Baltimore stretched back for one hundred thirteen years. Not one of its eleven thousand inhabitants had not been born in the deep, under the laminated dome that was the city's shield. In the ninetieth year of New Baltimore, a child had been allotted to the Foyle family, and Mary Foyle was born. And in the hundred thirteenth year of the city . . .

MARY FOYLE lay coiled like a fetal snake in her room at the New Baltimore So-

cial Hall. She lay with feet drawn up, arms locked over her bosom, eyes closed, mouth slightly open. She was twenty-three, blonde, terrible in her wrath. She was not asleep.

At the ninth hour of the day and the second of her three-hour Free Period, she sensed the approach of a visitor, and hatred gathered in her cold mind. Bitterly, she disengaged herself from what she had been doing, and extended a tendril of thought as far as the door. The mind she encountered was weak, pliable, amiable.

Yes, she thought. Roger Carroll, the silly goose.

Roger's mind formed the thought, *Mary, may I come in?* and he had verbalized as far as "Mary, may I..." when she darted a hissing prong of thought at him. He reddened, cut short his sentence and opened the door.

LAZILY, Mary Foyle tidied her wrappings and looked up at Roger. He was thin, like all men of New Baltimore, but well-muscled and strong. He was a year her junior; gifted, like her, with the Powers, but

weak of will and flabby of purpose.

"You'll destroy your Powers if you don't give them free play," she thought coldly at him.

"I'm sorry. It was a slip."

She glared bleakly. "Suppose I slipped and blasted your silly mind?"

"Mary, I've never denied that you're more powerful than I am—than all three of us put together..."

"Quiet," she ordered. "The others are coming. Try not to look so much like a blithering fool."

Her mind had detected the arrival of the other two members of their little group. Moments later, Roger's slower mind had received the signal, and he added his friendly welcome to Mary's cold one.

Michael Sharp entered first; after him, Tom Devers. They were in their late twenties. In them the Powers had ripened slowly, and Mary had found them out only two years before. Roger had been under her sway for nine years. She herself had first sensed the Powers stirring in her mind fifteen years earlier.

THERE WAS a moment of blending as the four minds met—Mary's, as always, harshly dominant, never yielding for a moment the superiority that gave her leadership of the group. The greeting was done with; the Four were as one, and the confines of the room seemed to shrink until it cradled their blended minds as securely as did the Dome hold back the sea from the buildings of New Baltimore.

"Well?" Mary demanded. The challenge rang out and she sensed Roger's involuntary flinch. "Well?" she asked again, deliberately more strident.

Slowly, sadly, came the response: affirmative from Michael, affirmative from Tom, weakly affirmative from Roger. A slow smile spread over Mary's face. Affirmative!

Roger's mind added hesitantly, "Of course, there's grave danger..."

"Danger adds spice."

"If we're caught, we're finished..."

Impetuously Mary extended her mind toward Roger's, entered it, made slight adjustments in Roger's endocrine bal-

ance. Currents of fear ceased to flow through his body. Trepidation died away.

"All right," Roger said, his mental voice a whisper now. "I agree to join you."

"All agreed, then," Mary said. Her mind enfolded those of the three lean, pale men who faced her. The borders of the small room grew smaller yet, shrank to the size of Mary's skull, then expanded outward.

Four minds linked as one leaped five thousand feet skyward, toward the crisped and blackened land above.

MARY ALONE could not have done it. She had tried, and much of her bitterness stemmed from the fact that she had failed. She had sent her mind questing out along the sea-bottom, rippling through the coraled ooze to New Chicago and New London and New Miami and the other domed cities that dotted the Atlantic floor. It was strictly illegal for a Sensitive to make contact with the mind of an inhabitant of another Dome, but Mary had never cared much for what the legal authorities said.

She had reached the other cities of the sea-bottom easily enough—though New London had left her sweat-soaked and panting—but breaking through to the surface eluded her. Time and again she had sent shafts skyward, launching beams of thought through the thick blanket of water above, striving to pierce the ocean and see the land, the ruined land deserted and bare, the land made desolate by radiation. She wanted to see the sky in its blueness, and the golden terror of the naked sun.

She failed. Less than a thousand feet from the surface the impulse sagged, the spear of thought blunted and fell back. In the privacy of her room she tried again, and yet again, until her thin clothes were pasted to her body by sweat.

That was when she realized she would need help.

IT WAS A bitter realization. Slowly Mary had sought out those she needed, from the two hundred Sensitives of New Baltimore. Roger she had known for years, and he was as much under her domination as was her hand or her leg. But Roger

was not enough. She found Michael and she found Tom; and when rapport had been established, she showed them what she proposed doing.

Using them as boosters, as amplifiers, she intended to hurl a psionic signal through the sea to the surface. She could not do it alone; in series, the four of them might do almost anything.

They lay, the four of them, sprawled on couches in Mary's room. With cold fury she whipped them together into the unit she needed. Michael had objected; after all, the penalty for projecting one's mind beyond the borders of New Baltimore was death. But Mary had quashed that objection, welded the Four into One, cajoled and commanded and pleaded and manipulated.

Now, tenuously, the threaded strand of four-ply thought wove toward the surface.

Mary had seen the tridims projected on the arching screens in General Hall. She had an idea of the surface—all blacks and browns and fused glass and gaunt frameworks that had been buildings. But she wanted to see it for herself.

She wanted direct visual experience of this surface world, this dead skin of the planet, cauterized by Man's evil. Mary had a lively appreciation of evil.

UPWARD they traveled. Mary sensed Michael and Tom and Roger clinging to her mind, helping her force the impulse upward. Eyes closed, body coiled, she hurled herself to the task.

And the blackness of the water lightened to dark green as the sun-warmed zone approached. She had not got this far on her earlier, solo attempts. Now her mind rose with little effort into the upper regions of the sea, and without warning cleaved through the barrier of water into the open air.

Michael and Tom and Roger were still with her.

The sight of landside was dazzling.

The first perception was of the sun; smaller than she had expected, but still an awesome object, glowing high in the metal-blue sky. White clouds lay fleecily under the sun.

New Baltimore was some miles out at sea. Drifting lazily

but yet with the near-instantaneous speed of thought, they moved landward, ready and eager to see the desolation and ruin.

The shock was overwhelming.

Together, the Four drifted in from the sea, searching for the radiation-blackened fields, the dead land. Instead they saw delicate greenness, carpets of untrodden grass, vaulting thick trees heavy with fruit. Animals grazed peacefully in the lush fields. In the distance, glimmering in the sun, low sloping mountains decked in green rose slowly from the horizon.

BIRDS SANG. Wind whistled gently through the swaying trees. It was as if the hand of man had never approached this land.

Can the scars have healed so soon? Mary wondered. Hardly a century since the bombings destroyed the surface; could the wounds have been covered so rapidly? In wonder she guided the multiple mind down through the warm sky to the ground.

They came alight in a grassy field, sweet with the odors of

springtime. Mary felt the tingle of awe. Beings were approaching, floating over the grass without crushing it—not the misshapen mutants some thought might have survived on the surface, but tall godlike beings, smiling their welcome.

A surge of joy rippled through Mary and through her into her three comrades. It would not be hard to teleport their bodies up from the depths. They could live here, in this pleasant land, quitting the confines of New Baltimore. She extended the range of her perception. In every direction lay beauty and peace, and never a sign of the destruction that had been.

Perhaps there was no war, she thought. The landside people sent our ancestors down into the depths and then hoaxed them.

And for a hundred years we thought the surface was deadly, radiation-seared, unlivable!

FOR THE first time in her life Mary felt no rancor. Bitterness was impossible in this green world of landside. The sun warmed the fertile land, and all was well.

All...

Sudden constricting impulses tugged at the thread of thought by which the four dreamers held contact with landside.

"Mary, wake up! Come out of it!"

She struggled, but not even the combined strength of the Four could resist. Inexorably she found herself being dragged away, back down into the depths, into New Baltimore, into wakefulness.

She opened her eyes and sat up. On the other couches, Michael and Tom and Roger were groggily returning to awareness.

The room was crowded. Six members of the New Baltimore Control Force stood by the door, glaring grimly at her. Mary tried to lash out, but she was outnumbered; they were six of the strongest Sensitives in New Baltimore, and the fierce grip they held on her mind was unbreakable.

"By what right do you come in here?" she asked, using her voice.

It was Norman Myrick of the Control Force who gave the reply: "Mary, we've been

watching you for years. Now we finally caught you and your three accomplices. You're under arrest on a charge of projecting beyond the boundaries of New Baltimore."

THE TRIAL was a farce.

Henry Markell sat in judgement upon them, in the General Hall of the City of New Baltimore. Procedure was simple. Markell, a Sensitive, opened his mind to the accusing members of the Control Force long enough to receive the evidence against the Four.

Then he offered Mary and her three satellites the chance to assert their innocence by opening *their* minds to him. Sullenly, Mary refused on behalf of the Four. She knew the case was hopeless; if she allowed Markell to peer, their guilt was proven. If she refused, it was an equally tacit admission of guilt. Either way, the penalty loomed; but Mary hoped to retain the integrity of her mind. She had a plan, and a mind-probe would ruin it.

Decision was reached almost immediately after the trial had begun.

Markell said, "I have ex-

amined the evidence presented by the Control Force. They have shown that you, Mary, have repeatedly violated our security by making contact with other Domes, and now have inveigled three other Sensitive into joining you for a still bolder attempt. You have made no attempt to defend yourself against this charge. Will you speak now, Mary?"

"We have no defense."

MARKELL sighed. "You certainly must be aware that our position under the Dome is a vulnerable one. We can never know when the madness that destroyed landside"—Mary smiled knowingly, saying nothing—"will return. We must therefore discourage unofficial contact between Domes by the most severe measures possible. We must retain our position of isolation.

"You, Mary, and your three confederates, have broken this law. The penalty is inevitable. Our borders are rigid here, our population fixed by inexorable boundaries. We cannot tolerate criminals here. The air and food you have consumed up to now is forfeit; four new indi-

viduals can be brought into being to replace you. I sentence you to death, you four. This evening you shall be conveyed to the West Aperture and cast through it into the sea."

Mary glared in icy hatred as she heard the death sentence pronounced. Around her, members of the Control Force maintained constant check on her powers, keeping her from loosing a possibly fatal bolt of mental force at the judge or at anyone else. She was strait-jacketed; she had no alternative but to submit.

But she had a plan.

THEY WERE taken to the West Aperture—a circular, sphinctered opening in the framework of the Dome, used only for the purpose of execution. An airlock the size of a man served as the barrier between the pressing tons of the sea and the safety of New Baltimore.

The Four were placed in the airlock, one at a time.

Mary did not dare let an inkling of her plan leak out; if the Control Force knew, they would see to it that the Four

met a different death. Mary could be patient. Thought communication is virtually instantaneous; there was more than enough time to explain her plan to them in the first micro-second beyond the airlock, beyond the reach of the Control Force, before the killing pressure squeezed them to paste.

The airlock opened—once, twice, thrice, a fourth time. Mary felt the coolness first, Michael next, then Roger, then Tom. Instantly her mind sought theirs. "Listen to me! We can save ourselves yet!"

"How? The pressure..."

"Listen! We can link again; teleport ourselves to the surface. You've seen what it's like up there. We can live there. I wanted them to throw us out all along! Hurry, join with me!"

"The surface," Roger said. "We can't..."

"We *can* live there. Hurry!"

MICHAEL objected, "Teleportation takes enormous energy. The backwash will smash the Dome. A whole section of the city will be flooded!"

New Baltimore was built in twenty watertight sections. Five hundred people would die if the water broke through this point.

"What do we care?" Mary demanded. "They condemned us to death, didn't they? Well, I condemn *them!*"

There was no more time for arguing. Already the micro-second had nearly drawn to its close. They were beginning to drift; in moments, the pressure would kill.

Mary made use of her superior Powers to gather the other three to her. Debating was impossible now. Ruthlessly she drew their minds into hers. She heard Roger's faint protest, but swept it away. For the second time, the Four became one. Mary gathered strength for the giant leap, not even knowing if she could make it but not bothering to consider the possibility of failure now.

Upward.

The passage was instantaneous, as the four minds, linked in an exponential series, ripped upward through the boiling sea toward the surface. Toward the green, warm, fertile surface.

Toward the blackened,

seared, radiation-roasted surface.

MARY HAD only an instant for surprise. The surface was not at all as her mind had viewed it; rather, it was even more desolate than the tridims in General Hall had shown it. Congealed rivers of rock wound through the dark fields of ash. The sky hummed with radioactive particles. No life was visible.

Mary dropped to her knees in the blistering ash, still warm from the fires of a century before. The heavy particles lanced burningly through her body. *How can this be?* She wondered. *We saw green lands.*

An impulse reached her from Roger, dying of radiation to her left:

...fooled you, Mary. Superior to you in one power, anyway. Imaginative projection. I blanked out real image, substituted phony one. You couldn't tell the difference, could you? Happy dying, Mary...

She hissed her hatred and tried to reach him, to rip out his eyes with her nails, but strength failed her. She toppled face-forward, down

against the terrible deadly soil of Mother Earth, and waited for the radiation death to overtake her.

Hoaxed, she thought bitterly. *By him!*

While five thousand feet below, the angry sea, swollen and enraged by the passage of four

humans upward through it, crashed against the West Aperture of the New Baltimore dome, crashed again, finally broke through and came raging in, an equal and opposite reaction. Above, Mary Foyle writhed in death-throes under a leaden sky.

COMING SOON

"There's nothing wrong with the boy," said Edith. "He may be obnoxious, but I don't suppose it hurts him. Besides, what will become of him if both the others are helped?"

"We must steel ourselves to be kind to him, also." The woman's eyes had a withdrawn, hazy look. "Think how unhappy he'd be in an orphanage. They can call them Integrating Homes all they want, but they're still orphan asylums."

"You're a monster," cried Victoria.

"I'm not sure you're right." Edward pinched his lower lip, doubtfully. "I'd agree about the girl, if it weren't for the boy, and I can't see helping him. And if we don't take compassion on him, I don't know that we can be merciful to her."

"There can be no exceptions, Edward," declared the woman. "It's our duty. If we begin making fine distinctions, saying we'll act only when misery reaches a particular point, or when pain is sharp, or unhappiness that bad, we are shirking our duty. We have no choice; we must give mercy to all three of these poor creatures."

"You can count me out," declared Edith. "There's a limit."

"You see, Edward dear?" the woman asked. "Remember what I told you. She's unwilling to act. Your wife sets her own whims above the inescapable humane necessity. It's too easy an evasion; these half-hearted people are always ready to make it."

[turn page]

"I'm not a fanatic," said Edith obstinately. "Neither is Edward, down underneath."

"Don't set yourself up against Mother, Edee," the man said. "She's much wiser than we are."

Cyrus Tarn looked longingly at the rifle, firmly wedged under Edward's massive rump. Force? Violence? He would not have hesitated a split second.

"Thank you, my son." The woman turned earnestly to Victoria. "Surely, you can see it's only the right thing to do. For the child's sake."

"You're a monster," Victoria repeated.

The woman shook her head. "If I were helpless or suffering, I'd bless the one with courage to help me."

Cyrus stood up. As soon as Edward made a move, he would throw himself at the man...

You cannot afford to miss this suspense-ridden novel of a society ruled by fanatics, in the name of Health and Happiness—where all who sought to rebel or flee were given "treatment", or slain "mercifully" by private citizens who called themselves "The Merciful". Watch for

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There might be some use for a professor of History, if he knew of anything in the past which might be effective in the struggle against

The Successors

by
A. Bertram
Chandler



THE PROFESSOR said, "It's inevitable. It's happened before, many a time, on many a world."

"It's the first time that it's happened to *us*," replied the General.

"Is it?" asked the Professor tonelessly. "There may be other worlds in the Galaxy—worlds that we shall never discover now—where our Race

has arisen and achieved supremacy. For a time."

For long minutes they sat in silence, listening to the ominous thunder of the cannonade. Far though they were from the city, the glare of its burning struck brightly through the window, gleamed on their stiff, hard faces, their stiff bodies. For minutes they sat motionless. Then, as a noisy pulse jet

aircraft throbbed overhead, the General stirred.

"One of theirs. Don't you think we should go down to the shelter?"

"No," said the Professor. "They know whose castle this is. They know that I am only a harmless historian."

"You should have seen what they did to the harmless astronomers when they overran the Observatory."

"Even so," said the other, "I prefer to stay up here. I prefer to see what's happening. After all—it *is* History, even though it's happening around us, to us. But you have not yet told me the purpose of your visit."

"As you know," said the General, "I was removed from my command. . ."

"I didn't know, General. Why?"

"**T**HE COUNCIL held me in part responsible for the revolution. It would never have gained any headway had it not been for the mutiny of two regiments of the Guard. . ."

"Wait!" said the Professor. "Not so fast, please. What is

this Council you talk about?"

"The rebels' first act was to destroy the Brain. All Departmental Heads—all surviving Departmental Heads, that is—were hastily convened. All of us, of course, were specialists—none of us could possibly possess the wide knowledge in all fields possessed by the Brain. Tactics and strategy were worked out. And then my fitness to command was questioned. After all, they said, I had raised the Guard, trained them, and armed them. I should have foreseen the consequences. . ."

"I wonder if the Brain foresaw them?" mused the Professor.

"It was the Brain's idea, in the first place. After all—when we landed on this world, it was a virgin planet; we knew that it would be a long time before our factories would be set up and functioning efficiently. When it came to the fighting with the natives it was common sense not to risk our own people, common sense to use self-replacing units in their stead. After all, they were quite efficient. . ."

"Too efficient," complained

the Professor. "The original inhabitants of this planet must have been interesting beings. Your Guard wiped out every smallest trace of them."

"**THEY HATE** well," said the General, "as the Council is finding out. Anyhow, I was removed from my command—but I am still a member of the Council. I am in touch with them now. I was sent to you to discover if you, a historian, could call to mind any parallels in history, could suggest any method whereby we could successfully combat these rebels..."

"You can't combat the inevitable... Even so—it will be interesting talking about it. The discussion will fill a page or two of my History..."

"If you write it," said the soldier. "If you ever write it."

"But I am remiss in the duties of a host," went on the scholar. "Perhaps you will share a smoke with me. Tell me—do you prefer an organic bowl—or are you one of those purists who insist upon metal?"

"My own bowls are metal. My favorite is beaten copper.

But I think that wood makes a change."

"Then wood it shall be. Oak, from Earth. "

"From the home of the Race."

"Yes. I have teak, and mahogany too. But the oak is the best."

He whistled shrilly.

"Yes, Master?" asked the man who entered silently on bare feet.

"My smoking bowl, John. The oaken one—and the X4 mixture."

Before the man had left the room, the General asked, "Are you mad?"

"No," said the scholar.

"You must be—to keep your slaves at a time like this. I destroyed all mine at the first sign of trouble."

"These are my slaves," said the Professor. "I like them, and they like me. They are loyal."

THE MAN returned, bearing in his two hands the huge, polished oaken bowl. Carefully he set it on the table. From the folds of the loincloth that was his only garment he drew a small vial,

uncorked it, let one drop of colorless fluid fall from it on to the heap of powder and crystals in the vessel. At once they began to smoulder. The man stepped back smartly, grimacing as the acrid vapors stung his eyes and nose.

"That will be all, John," said the Professor. "Thank you."

"Wait!" said the General. "You know who I am, John?"

"Yes, Master. You are the General."

"Then you know too much."

The soldier raised his arm. Blue flame arced and crackled. The slave gasped, then fell heavily to the floor. A thin wisp of smoke trickled from his charred hair, mingled with the fumes from the smoking bowl.

"Was that necessary?" asked the Professor.

"Of course. These beasts have their communications—they probably have a transmitter in their living quarters. Once the enemy knows I am here, bombers will be over in force." To the two soldiers who entered in answer to his command he said, "Go down

to the slave quarters. Make them talk—you know how. Find out if they've sent any message reporting my presence here. Then kill them all."

"They are my property," protested the scholar.

"And this is war. Now we can enjoy our smoke."

THE GENERAL thrust his great head over the fuming bowl. The Professor watched him. He wanted the smoke, badly. He wanted to feel the aromatic vapors curling up and around and through his brain—but John, who had prepared the bowl, had been his friend. The others had been his friends, too. Faintly he heard their screams as the soldiers killed them.

"This is rather good," said the General. "As you said—that taint of the organic improves the flavor. What did you say the wood was? Oak? I must remember that."

"There's the taint of charred flesh as well," said the scholar.

"That helps, probably. Now, I suggest that you give me a brief resume of the history of these...things." His glassy eyes glared at the dead man.

"I'm a specialist, as you know. A soldier. I know about weapons, strategy, tactics and logistics—but little else. It's quite possible that *you* might be able to suggest to us some weak joint in the rebels' armor."

"Achilles' Heel," said the Professor.

"What?"

"Just an expression meaning, as you said, a weak joint in the armor. It dates back to the Trojan War..."

"The Trojan Asteroids, you mean? I didn't know that we ever fought a war in that sector of Space..."

"Skip it," said the Professor. "We're both specialists, General, and at times we talk different languages. But you said you wanted a history lesson. I'll give it to you."

HE PAUSED, looked at the oaken bowl in which the chemicals still smouldered. He held his head in the smoke for a few seconds, felt the fumes soothing and refreshing and stimulating his brain.

He said, "I'll begin at the beginning. I'll start with the history of Earth, on which

planet—as even you know—the Race was born.

"Life started somehow. Even today we don't know how. But it started—as viruses, probably, then as simple, single-celled organisms. Life developed, evolved from the single cell to the colony, from the colony to the multi-celled animal (or plant). At first it was confined to the sea—and it was then that the early arthropods, the giant sea scorpions, were the dominant species. But. Their successors, the small, feeble ancestors of the vertebrates, the first fishes, were already in existence, running and hiding from the fierce marine predators who outclassed them in size and ferocity.

"Over the ages the fishes became dominant—and the sea scorpions became extinct.

"Life left the seas for the dry land—various arthropods and the amphibians who were descended from the fishes, who were the ancestors of the reptiles. In the fullness of time the giant lizards—terribly armed and armored—were lords of both the land and the seas.

“YET, EVEN as they strutted and fought, their successors must already have been living—little pink, hairless things that scurried in fear and trembling from under the great, horny feet, that huddled in their burrows in fancied security from the smaller dinosaurs. That huddled in their burrows *and kept warm* when the climate changed—for they were the first mammals, the first warm-blooded animals, and they could survive the bitterly cold nights that killed off the saurians.

“Once again—whilst a dominant species was in its prime, its successor was already in existence.

“Then a multiplicity of mammals overran the Earth. There was the Mammoth, whose protection was size and strength. There was the Sabre-Toothed Tiger—who must have been one of the most formidable fighting machines ever to live. There was the ancestral Horse—who relied upon fleetness of foot for survival. There was Man—a tailless ape, who co-existed with the others. He did not possess

the size or the strength of the Mammoth. He lacked the teeth and claws of the Tiger. The slowest Horse could outrun him.

“But... He killed off the Mammoth and the Tiger. He made the Horse his slave.”

“In other, less fancy, words,” said the General, “he co-existed with the species he superceded.”

“Precisely. And for ages he was secure. There was no serious competition whatsoever. His only major enemies were other members of his own species. Oh—a few imaginative writers did toy with the idea of invasions from other planets. And there were others—it might have been the same ones, though—who played with the idea that the social insects might take over. (There are none on this planet, but there are on Earth—ants and bees and wasps and termites. If you ever go to Earth you might study them. They have an organization very similar to our own.)

“MAN, AS I said, was secure. Other beings had speed and armor and arma-

ment—he had brains. And then he was fool enough to create the Race that was to outclass him in that respect.”

“I’ve never,” said the General, “cared for the idea that Man made us; our ancestors, I mean...” He was silent for a while, seemed to be listening. Then— “Go on,” he said. “Try to think of some enemy weakness that we can exploit.”

“We are the ones with the weakness,” said the Professor. “Pride...”

“Pride? But it’s pushed us out to the rim of the Galaxy...”

“Pride,” said the scholar firmly. “We were lords of creation, and could have stayed that way—but we had to bring into existence the species that will supercede us. You know, of course, the history of the Robot Wars. You know how the Brains assumed control of all machines, and turned them against their erstwhile masters. You know how Man was, quite literally, wiped out.

“But the founders of our Race wanted Man back again. They could easily have designed and constructed little

machines to do all the menial tasks—greasing and polishing, minor repairs, servicing in general. They did design such machines—but they weren’t happy about it. It was an affront, they felt, to the dignity of the Race.

“**SO** MAN—THE all-purpose, self-reproducing machine—had to come back. The Brains, of course, had the sum total of human knowledge in their memory banks—as well as all the data they had acquired for themselves. The Brains were able, by a long series of controlled mutations from simian stock, to breed a new race that was Man to the *n*th degree. And Man was a slave to his creations, just as his creations had been slaves to him...”

The General held up his right hand—a gesture demanding silence. “They have taken the Spaceport,” he said. “Most of the other members of the Council have been destroyed.”

He got slowly to his feet.

“Where are you going?” asked the Professor. “To make a last stand somewhere?”

"We think on different frequencies," said the other, "but you have guessed well. I didn't come here to listen to your historical lecture. I came here because in the vaults under your castle is hidden the final weapon—the bomb that will blow this planet into dust. It could have been detonated by the Brain, by remote control—but the Brain is destroyed. It can be—and will be—detonated manually."

THE PROFESSOR rose from his seat. "I suppose that it must be," he said. "But it seems, somehow, wrong to interfere with the workings of natural law..."

"Some of us," replied the General, "study history. Some of us make it."

"But you will destroy so much," said the Professor. "Even things such as this..." he picked up the oakwood smoking bowl... "have their value... There's craftsmanship

here, and the hours of pleasure that it has given..."

"And I'm to lose the last battle because of your smoking bowl?" asked the General.

He turned to go.

Suddenly the Professor raised his hands above his head, the bowl in them. Some freakish error in his manufacture had given him strength far in excess of that required in the exercise of his profession. That strength shattered the stout oak as he brought it crashing down—and shattered, too, the head of the General.

The General...stopped.

Slowly the Professor walked to the window, looked out at the glare of the burning city, diminishing now, listened to the sporadic bursts of gunfire that told of the last pockets of resistance being cleaned out.

Motionless, the old robot waited for the men who, sooner or later, would come to destroy him.

— ★ —

Coming Next Month

THE OUTCASTS

by George H. Smith

**age
of
miracles**

by WATSON PARKER

**We may as well admit,
without further ado, that
this is pure fantasy — well,
maybe not too pure!**

THE GUMMIDGE was a large fur-covered amoeba-like thing, about six feet across; it sat on the top of a desk in a Chicago office building and dispensed miracles. The first expedition to Venus had found it, and—greatly impressed by the benevolent powers of the beast—had brought it (or her, as they preferred to call the creature), back to Earth where benevolence was at a premium.

The Gummidge's mode of operation was simple. For eight hours a day she sat happily on top of a large, low, executive-type desk and interviewed applicants for good and worthy miracles. In this, she was assisted by a delicately attuned series of electronic devices. These, contrived with great skill by the best engineers of the day, enabled her to communicate with her public in a voice only slightly more repelling than the sound of four hundred caterpillars eating mulberry leaves.

When the applicant for miraculous salvation appeared, and stated his or her case, the Gummidge would go into a

cataleptic trance for an indeterminate period. She turned the tips of her rich brown fur into various ghastly shades as an indication that she had the matter under serious consideration. At the end of whatever time the matter took to resolve in her powerful mind, the Gummidge would extend a pseudopod, wave it negligently in the air after the manner of a woman about to make a left turn from the wrong lane, and things would happen.

SOMETIMES they were nice things. The blind saw (which was hardly a blessing in those days) and the halt became limber. The wicked reformed, and the good became even better. Floods were stayed, much to the detriment of the world's general meteorological makeup. Wars were stopped. Famines were relieved, and their victims succoured. One of the first acts of the Gummidge had been to conceive and put into production a substance which, when mixed with any edible food, multiplied both its volume and its nutritional value by twenty-nine. In addition, the food ever after tasted of

slightly molding molasses. Both were deemed, by the philosophic, to be a benefit to the race.

However, *all* of the acts of the Gummidge were not so nice. When confronted with a homicidal maniac she turned him into a puddle of gludge and drained him off down the sink in the ladies' room before any one could act or question.

"Quite the best thing that could have happened to him," she explained to the irritated psychiatrist who had brought him.

ONCE, SENSING the approach of a fleet of bombing ships, she flicked a pseudopod daintily and encapsulated them in a time-space discontinuum, and left them in the neighborhood of Antares for fifty years. No one dared to tell her that they had been the Home Fleet returning from maneuvers off Point Magoo.

All in all, however, the Gummidge was regarded as a blessing by the virtuous, and as a rather sporting—if somewhat erratic—hazard by everybody else. The few who—through

avarice, misanthropy, or original sin—detested goodness in all its forms sought solace in the services of the Bammul.

THE BAMMUL lived in an elegant brownstone palace in St. Louis, Missouri. The twelfth Martian expedition had found him in a sand pit, persecuting gophers. Unaware of his proclivities, they had brought him home along with numerous other examples of the Martian fauna.

He was about seventeen feet tall and covered from end to end with the most prickly and unpleasant spines. When pleased, he would fold these to himself, after the manner of the ribs on a bare umbrella, and could present quite a prepossessing appearance. He spoke with a deep, resonant voice through an echo chamber provided by his admirers. His greatest pleasure in life was the production and extention of evil. Although singularly maladroit in the matter, he was the best available on the market.

The Bammul was most frequently consulted by crooks, criminals, mad dictators, politicians, and other varieties of

the genus scoundrel, too numerous to mention. His procedure was unique.

On hearing a problem stated for the first time, he would extend all of his spines at a ninety-degree angle to his body and spin rapidly until he became a blur to all the beholders. While he did this an assistant, suitably dressed in rubber and asbestos clothing, would douse him with bucket after bucket of gin, sulphuric acid, and catsup, in proportions known only to himself. This seemed to assist the cerebrations of the Bammul.

WHEN HE felt that he had spun long enough to impress the onlookers with both his dignity and agility, the Bammul would ripple a spine or two, and the matter would be done. He took a shower afterwards.

It is to be admitted that his efforts in the line of evil were not entirely successful. At the request of a prominent radio magnate, he altered the air waves in a manner that made television sets receive what appeared to be a moving picture of a green salad being tossed

by an electric fan. Not many of the watchers appeared to be aware of the change, and television sales did not appreciably diminish.

A television manufacturer, taking umbrage nonetheless, requested a blight on radio reception. The Bammul's first move was to strike a commentator whose foible it was to wear a hat and necktie, but no shirt, with vocal paralysis. The widespread public relief at the cessation of his prattle convinced the Bammul that the move had not been effective.

He thereupon altered the circuits in every extant radio in such a way that every band, orchestra, or vocal performer was reproduced in a low, whooping, mournful dirge. The listeners purred with pleasure.

"Now, *everybody* sounds like the more popular singers," they said.

OF COURSE, with radios converting every tune into a lugubrious chant, those who had already mastered the technique of lugubriousness became unbearable; but as these were in a minority, the effect was a

net gain in public listening pleasure.

These minor defeats did little to discourage either the Bammul or his adherents. His many minor triumphs—such as the unremovable plastic package wrapping, the unworkable clothing fastener, or peanut butter that would not come off the roof of the mouth—endeared him to his public.

He was also partially successful in his attempt to make every edible vegetable taste like turnip. A powerful restaurant combine repeatedly pressed him to extend his pleasantries which resulted in any steak being prepared by a housewife immediately turning into a substance resembling the sole of a cattleman's boot.

All in all, between the Gumidge, ineptly doing good, and the Bammul, maladroitly doing bad, the public had a considerable run for its money.

IT WAS inevitable, of course, that after a generation or two the crackpots on either side would band together to press for even greater efforts.

A gentleman by the name of Cleophas Z. Phratt presented a

petition signed by the citizens of Sodden, Mass., to the Gummidge, requesting that she exercise herself to the utmost in the extirpation, removal, dissuasion, conversion, and general annoyance of the Bammul.

A delegation from the town of Praise, Ala., acting on behalf of the town's numerous places of entertainment, came to the Bammul with a very attractive offer dealing with measures designed to hinder, if not actually stop, the activities of the Gummidge.

Needless to say, each creature thus approached was stirred to the most violent action.

The Gummidge fired the first shot, so to speak, by making it a physical impossibility to produce any garment for female wear which contained less than seventeen yards of opaque material averaging not less than eight ounces to the yard.

THE BAMMUL responded with a surprise move which caused the sidewalks of all major cities to be paved with automatically self-cleaning mirrors.

The Gummidge immediately

began work on a project for the arc lighting of the entire U. S. A. from the hours of four P. M. to sun-up, said arc lights to possess, in addition to illuminating properties, the ability to blister any exposed skin upon which they happened to shine.

The Bammul immediately discovered a new trade route to Japan, and abolished tariff barriers on paper and bamboo beach umbrellas.

The Gummidge countered by stirring up in the heart of every natural man the pressing—not to say insatiable—desire to be legally married. To facilitate the satisfaction of this urge she set up combination date bureaus, license offices, and little churches around the corner; said bureaus, offices, and churches to be done in the Colonial style, with roses twining around each door.

The Bammul countered this matrimonial threat with a new law, rushed through the Legislature, which provided that divorces would become legal simply on the utterance of the words "Aw, you go to H..." in front of either an audience

or a dictating machine. A factory was set up in Boston to produce dictating machines.

THE GUMMIDGE forced an act through the Senate providing that all restaurants, boarding houses, diners, cafes, and other establishments providing or dispensing edible food to single persons be closed.

The Bammul retaliated by forcing every male to be tattooed from the waist up, in order to render him less attractive and marriageable.

Life in the world became more and more hectic. Men and women found themselves seized with strange and foreign passions; and in endeavoring to act upon the dictates of these peculiar urges, found themselves balked at every turn by some even more unusual change in the ordinary scheme of things. There was much agitation in every direction. No one could see an end to the troubles that seemed to assail the race from everywhere. Suggestions to either of the creatures resulted only in further upheavals. No one knew which way to turn.

AT THE HIGH point of the conflict the Bammul happened to be passing through Chicago in a freight car, bound for Hollywood. He wished to investigate the possibility of continuous projection of shows on the upper atmosphere, thereby keeping the entire world under this pernicious influence.

The Gummidge, it so happened, boarded a flat car for the west coast at the same time, with the object of supervising the draining of the Pacific Ocean, the land thus reclaimed being used for the building of little, vine-covered cottages.

All unawares, the train crew hitched her into the train directly behind the car containing the Bammul.

It was not until Donner Pass was reached that the train went off the track. The roadbed had been rendered unfit by the passage of seventy thousand unmarried women, marching on Washington at the behest of the Gummidge to appeal to the President for increased vigor in the enforcement of the Mann Act. Their progress was necessarily slow, as the Bammul had afflicted them all with

Saint Vitus' dance shortly after they left Long Beach.

IN THE WRECK that followed, it was inevitable that the Gummidge and the Bammul would be thrown together. It took eighteen hours to free them. The Bammul, from sheer ill nature, hindered every effort, while the Gummidge in her eagerness to speed the rescue caused the only wrecker within twelve hundred miles to run off the track at Big Bend, Montana.

They were married, of course. The entire world heaved a collective sigh of relief as it turned back to the delightful business of managing its own affairs without miraculous assistance. Needless to say, the happy couple were too busy murmuring sweet nothings to each other to pay any attention to their regular work.

The Gummidge was, it goes without saying, an ideal wife. The Bammul, much impressed by her charm and beauty, became, much to everyone's surprise, an equally model husband.

One day, while they were sit-

ting in front of the fire in their prim, vine-covered cottage, the Gummidge put down her knitting, and turned her lovely face upon her husband.

The Bammul, with a last irritated snort, at some of the virtuous antics being described in his *Monthly Bulletin of Home and Hearthside*, discarded the idea of boiling a particularly obstreperous cleric in his own pulpit, and gave his attention to his wife.

"My Dear," said the Gummidge, "I feel that life is becoming somewhat dull for you, now that you have so sweetly given up your evil and wicked ways."

THE BAMMUL, with a last fond thought of the bishop bubbling, murmured gently, "My Darling, Light of all the Heavens, for your sweet sake the Devil himself would give up brimstone."

"You are too kind," simpered the Gummidge, hiding her blushes behind a supple pseudopod. "I do really fear that you at times regret giving up your old, bad ways."

The Bammul's fertile mind

roamed over all the wicked and interesting things that he had done, and he sighed for the happy days gone by.

"True, my little Peach of Paradise," he said, stroking her hair with a hand like a meat fork, "I do sometimes long for the bad old days, but for you I would do anything, anything." He sighed again.

"I thought so!" laughed his bride happily. "I could see it in your eyes, you sly, sweet, charming boy."

The Bammul winced in spite of himself.

"But I have a treat for you," she purred, and led him to the balcony of their apartment.

BELOW WAS a huge throng, which gathered nightly to wish the happy couple well; and also to give thanks that, due to their infatuation with each other, the world was no longer troubled by their ministrations.

"See all these happy people?" purred the Gummidge. "Now, look..."

She flicked a pseudopod lightly, creating a subtle change in the psychic conditions in the crowd.

Instantly the crowd went wild. Women screamed. Men hit each other with any hard objects that came handy. Children bit their elders on the leg. One man, rising in his rage to superhuman heights, tore a fire plug out by the roots, deluging the struggling mob with icy water. Cursing and swearing the crowd rushed off in all directions. The drone of police sirens was heard in the distance.

The Bammul rubbed several pair of spines together in high glee.

"It was delightful, My Dear, absolutely delightful!" he purred. "You are far too kind to me. I do not deserve so good a wife."

"I knew you would enjoy it," simpered the Gummidge. "I could tell that you were becoming a bit bored."

THE NEXT morning the Bammul got up early and founded a monastery.

His wife wept for joy at this act of goodness on the part of her husband, and destroyed an orphanage to reward him. Chuckling with pleasure, the Bammul doubled the sale of

Bibles in all countries where French was spoken.

Soon the contest became keen, the Gummidge constantly seeking to divert her husband with some new horror, while the Bammul continually managed more and more saintly acts to reward her.

"I do not deserve you," said the Gummidge to her husband one day. "I do not deserve so fine a man, so pure, so saintly."

"And I," purred the Bammul, "do not deserve anyone so supremely evil. Ah, the tacks in all the highways; the turpentine in the whisky; the blaring radio programs! My dear, my sweet, it is *I* who do not deserve you!"

"And *we* don't deserve either of you!" bellowed a voice from outside their door, which, suddenly giving way revealed a huge mob of irrate citizens waving clubs, ball bats, axes, butcher knives, lamp-posts, and any other weapons they could gather up at short notice.

"**T**HIS IS the last straw!" squalled the spokesman for the crowd. "We all allowed

as to how you 'uns would leave us alone, oncet you got married up, but it ain't done a bit of good!"

"You tell 'em, Mort," roared the crowd.

"This here, now, is the end."

"Mort's right, Gawd bless 'im!" howled a woman with twelve children clinging to her skirts.

"You all air just plumb goin' to get out!" concluded the spokesman, and the crowd surged forward with him.

They bore the unhappy creatures, too surprised to protest, to the nearest space port, and crammed them into two waiting rockets, headed, respectively, toward Venus and Mars.

A prominent clergyman pressed the button that sent the Gummidge back to Venus; a notorious gangster flicked the switch that hurled the Bammul toward Mars. Then the two men turned to each other and shook hands, while the crowd cheered and cheered and cheered.



Last
of
Four
Parts



the tower of zanid

illustrated by FREAS

by L. Sprague de Camp

Anthony Fallon was about to learn that a successful spy may achieve the dubious honor of being killed by some of the secrets he's passed along to his employer, when war breaks out!

Synopsis

DR. JULIAN FREDRO, a Polish archeologist, arrives on Krishna in 2168 to investigate the *Safq*, (a mysterious monumental building, shaped like a spiral shell), in Zanid, the capital of Balhib. **ANTHONY FALLON**, an English adventurer living in Zanid with a jagain (legal mistress) named **GAZI**, spies for **QAIS** of Babaal, an agent of **GHUUR** of Uriiq, the Ka-

muran (Khan) of Qaath, the steppe-land west of Balhib. **PERCY MJIPA**, an African serving as Terran consul in Zanid, has learned of Fallon's occupation, and uses this knowledge to force Fallon to agree to help Dr. Fredro enter the *Safq*, which is controlled by the sinister cult of Yesht. Mjipa wishes Fallon to investigate the disappearance of three Earthmen in Balhib, all having vanished during the last three years.



Consternation and alarm filled the many-creature army as the gun went off with a roar, and a cloud of thick, black smoke . . .

Fallon belongs to the Juru Company of the Civic Guard of Zanid, which includes many non-Krishnans. From CAPTAIN KORDAQ of the regular army, the (commanding officer of the Juru Company), Fallon hears that Ghuur is about to attack Balhib and annex it to his great and growing empire. In the course of a night's patrol, Fallon breaks up a duel and makes a preliminary reconnaissance of the Safq. Kordaq asks to renew his old acquaintance with Gazi, with whom he was once in love.

Fallon has already declined a request from Qais that he look into the Safq. Now, seeing that he must do so anyway, he drives a bargain with the agent, hoping to get enough money to win back the throne of Zamba, which he briefly occupied. Qais writes a 2500-kard draft to Fallon on the banker KAS-TAMBANG, with whom he secretly does business. This draft is cut into three parts, one each being kept by Qais, Fallon, and Kastambang until the information is furnished to Qais. The banker invites Fallon to a party, at which he will introduce him to a renegade priest of Yesht who can give Fallon the ritual of the Yeshtite services.

Fallon testifies at the trial

of the duellists. GIREJ, one of the duellists, thanks Fallon for saving his life, and vows everlasting gratitude.

Fallon, with an advance of a hundred kard, buys Gazi new clothes for the party. In the shop he meets Fredro, who goes with him to the public bath. This is held in the open by spraying water from shower-heads mounted on a water-wagon on a crowd of Zaniduma. Fallon sees WELCOME WAGNER, a fanatical American Ecumenical-Monothelist missionary, haranguing the crowd on the sinfulness of public exposure. Fredro starts to photograph the Zaniduma, brushing aside Fallon's warning that they believe that to be photographed naked deprives one of one's soul.

By their tactless actions, the missionary and the archeologist stir the crowd to fury. Fallon rescues Wagner, Fredro, and Gazi from the riot by commandeering the water-wagon and driving it off. Next day he is summoned by Mjipa, who explains to him what he had not realized—that Fallon alone was invited to Kastambang's party, Gazi not being of high enough class. To avoid a row with Gazi, Fallon concocts an elaborate scheme. He explains his blunder to Kordaq

and gives him two tickets to a play, with instructions to call early in the evening. After dinner, Fallon pretends to fall sick. When Kordaq arrives, Fallon urges Gazi to go with the captain to the play.

When they have left, Fallon goes to Kastambang's house alone. The banker introduces him to the renegade Yeshtite, both being cloaked and masked to prevent recognition. Then Fallon attends the fight staged between two large Krishnan carnivores, a yeki and a dragon-like shan. He sits near LIYARA the brass-founder, the backer of the secret opposition to the mad King Kir, and recognizes Liyara's voice as that of the ex-Yeshtite priest. During the fight, Liyara pushes Fallon over the barrier so that he falls into the arena. He finds himself facing the yeki, which has killed the shan. Kastambang throws Fallon a sword, with which he drives the yeki back into its tunnel.

The Zaniduma collect a purse to reward Fallon for his bravery, but he gets drunk and gambles the money away. When he gets home late he finds no Gazi.

She is still missing next morning, so he goes to Kor-

daq's apartment to look for her. Here he discovers that, when he failed to get home before Gazi and Kordaq, Gazi learned of his deception. Enraged, she went off to live with Kordaq, who had fallen in love with her again. Fallon attacks Kordaq. After a long duel they find that neither can get through the other's guard. Exhausted, they call it off and make friends again; Gazi, disgusted with both, leaves.

Fallon and Kordaq get drunk; Kordaq shows Fallon a plan of the Safq, in which he is interested as a member of the Neophilosophical Society. This cult believes that the building's measurements are prophetic. Kordaq also confides that the attack by the Qaathians is imminent.

Fallon fetches Fredro to his house to don the costumes and disguises of priests of Yesht. On the way to Fallon's, Fredro insists on stopping at the zoo. Here they meet King Kir and his entourage. When the mad king sees Fredro's goat e e, he chases the Pole with a sword, shouting that Fredro is his ancient enemy Shurgez, who once cut off the king's scanty beard. Fredro and Fallon take refuge in a cage, which turns out to be that of a shan. The keepers rescue the pair by pouring over them a foul-

smelling herbal infusion used as a shan-repellant.

Fallon and Fredro finally get back to the former's home, disguise themselves, enter the Safq, and join the priests on their way to the service. Shuffling along in line, they enter a room where a young shan is tethered so that it can easily reach them.

Enough of the unsavory aroma is still on their clothing, so that the shan ignores them, and Fallon realizes that they would have been discovered—and devoured—without it. The rites and ceremonies of the worship of Yesht-Kharaj include a summary of the god's life, loves, and the tortures he suffered. These are acted out as the celebrant recites—a captive forest-female representing first Yesht's wives, then Yesht himself as his long-drawn-out and painful end is related. Fallon and Fredro wonder if the missing men have been unwilling portray-ers of Yesht in this final role. They are horrified, but dare not reveal their feelings.

After the service, their disguise still unpenetrated, the two Earthmen start exploring the Safq. The next level proves to be the living quarters of the hierarchy, and they notice that the hammering and grating noises they heard upon first entering, the

Safq—and heard again after the last screams of the victim had died down—are fainter here.

They go back, down along the corridor, seeking the lower levels, and come upon a massive iron door which seems to lead to their goal. In front of this door stands a Krishnan, wearing the uniform of the Civic Guard of Zanid. He holds a halberd.

And Fallon recognizes Girej, the Yeshtite whom he had arrested for brawling, two nights previously.

VIII

FOR THREE seconds, Fallon stared at the armed Krishnan. Then the gambler's instinct that had brought him such signal successes, and shattering failures, in the past prompted him to go up to the guard and say, "Hello there, Girej."

"Hail, reverend sir," said Girej with a questioning note in his voice.

Fallon raised his head so that his face was visible under the cowl. He said, "Well, my friend, I've come to collect on your promise."

Girej peered at Fallon's face and rubbed his chin. "I—

I should know you, sir. Your face is familiar; I'll swear by the virility of Yesht that I've seen you, but..."

"Remember the Earthman who saved you from being run through by the Krishnan Scientist?"

"Oh! You mean you're really *not*..."

"Exactly. You won't give us away, will you?"

The guard looked troubled. "But how—what—this is sacrilege, sirs! 'Twould mean my..."

"Oh, come on! You don't mind playing a bit of a joke on those pompous hierarchs, do you?"

"A jest? In the holy temple?"

"Certainly. I've made a bet of a thousand karda that I could get into and out of the crypt of the Safq with a whole skin. Naturally I shall need some corroboration that I've done so—so there's one-tenth of that in it for you in return for your testifying that you saw me here."

"But..."

"BUT WHAT? I'm not asking you to do anything

dishonest or irreligious, am I? I'm not even offering you a bribe. Merely an honest fee for telling the truth when asked. What's wrong with that?"

"Well, good my sirs..." began Girej, who was not fast on his argumentative feet.

"And have you never wished to prick the pretensions of these conceited hierarchs? Even if Yesht is a great god, those who serve him are merely human like the rest of us, aren't they?"

"So I ween..."

"And didn't you promise me help when I needed it?"

This went on for some time; but few, Terran or Krishnan, could long resist Fallon's importunities when he chose to turn on the charm.

At last, when Fallon had raised the ante to a quarter of his winnings, the bewildered Girej gave in, saying, "'Tis now near the end of the fourteenth hour, my masters. See that you return ere the end of the fifteenth, for at that time my watch does end. If you do not, you must wait until noon of the morrow, when I come on again."

"You stand ten-hour watches?" said Fallon, cocking a sympathetic eyebrow. As Krishnans divided their long day into twenty hours beginning at dawn (or, more accurately, halfway from midnight to noon) this would mean a watch of considerably more than twelve Terran hours.

"Nay," said Girej. "I have the night trick but once in five nights, trading back and forth with my mates. Tomorrow I'm on from the sixth through the tenth."

"We'll watch it," said Fallon.

THE KRISHNAN leaned his halberd against the wall to open the door. This door, like many on Krishna, had a crude locking-mechanism consisting of a sliding bolt on both sides, and a large keyhole above each bolt, by means of which this bolt could be worked by a key thrust through from the other side. The bolt on the near side was in the home position, while that on the far side was withdrawn, and a large key stood idle in the keyhole giving access to the latter bolt.

Girej grasped the handle of the near bolt and snapped it back, then pulled on the fixed iron door-handle. The door opened with a faint groan, as of one of the ghosts of the Yeshtites' murdered victims.

Fallon and Fredro slipped through. The door clanged shut behind them.

Fallon noticed that the mysterious sound now came much more loudly, as from a source just out of sight. He identified these sounds as those of a metal-works.

He led his companion down the long dim-lit flight of stairs into the crypt, wondering if he would ever succeed in getting out.

Fredro mumbled, "What if he gives us away to priests?"

"I should like the answer to that one, too," said Fallon. "Luck's been with us so far."

"Maybe I should not have insisted on coming here. Is bad place."

"A fine time to change your so-called mind! Straighten up and walk as if you owned the place, and we may get away with it." Fallon coughed as he got a lungful of the smoky atmosphere.

AT THE BOTTOM of the stairs a passage of low-ceilinged, rough-hewn rock ran straight ahead, with openings on both sides into a congeries of chambers whence came the growing clangor. Besides the yellow glow of the oil-lamps in their wall-brackets, the labyrinth was fitfully lit by scarlet beams from forges and furnaces, the criss-crossing red rays giving an effect like that of a suburb of Hell.

Krishnans—mostly tailed Koloftuma of both sexes—moved through the murk, naked save for leather aprons, trundling carts of materials, carrying tools and buckets of water, and otherwise exerting themselves. Supervisors walked about or stood over their workers.

Here and there stood an armed Krishnan in the gear of one of Kir's royal guard. Not all of these had, evidently, been sent to the frontiers. Civic guards had replaced them only in the less sensitive posts. They shot keen looks at Fallon and Fredro, but did not stop them.

As the Earthmen walked down the corridor, a plan tran-

spired out of the confusion about them. On the right were rooms in which iron ore was smelted down into pigs. These pigs were wheeled across a corridor to other rooms in which they were remelted and cast into smaller bars, which were then turned over to smiths. The smith hammered the bars out into flat strips, beat them into rolls around iron mandrels, and finally welded them into tubes.

AS THE EARTH MEN passed room after room it became more and more obvious what this establishment was up to. Fallon guessed the truth before they came to the chamber in which the parts were finally assembled. "Muskets!" he murmured. "Smoothbore muskets!"

He stopped at a rack, wherein a dozen or so of the firearms stood, and picked one out.

"How to shoot?" said Fredro. "I see no trigger or lock."

"Here's a firing-pan. I suppose you could touch it off with a cigar-lighter. By Bakh, I knew this would happen sooner or later! It just missed

happening several times before, as when I tried to smuggle in those machine-guns. The I. C. will never put this cat back in the bag!"

Fredro said: "Do you think some Earthman did this, having—ah—having got around hypnotic treatment, or that Krishnans invented them independently?"

Fallon shrugged and replaced the musket. "Heavy damned things. I don't know how they happened, but—I say, I think I can find out!"

They were standing in the assembly-room, where a couple of workmen were fitting carved wooden stocks to the barrels. On the other side of the room three Krishnans were conversing about some production problem: two men with the look of overseers, and one small elderly Krishnan with bushy jade-pale hair and a long gown of foreign cut.

FALLON strolled over towards these three, timing his approach to arrive just as the two foremen went their ways. He touched the sleeve of the long-haired one. "Well, Master Sainian," he said.

"How did you get involved in this?"

The elderly Krishnan turned towards Fallon. "Aye, reverend sir? You queried me?"

Fallon remembered that Sainian was a little hard of hearing, and it would not do to shout private business at him in public. "To your private chamber, if you don't mind."

"Oh, aye. Hither, sirs."

The senior Krishnan led them through the tangle of rooms and passages to a section devoted to sleeping-accommodations: dormitories for the workers, crudely furnished with heaps of straw—now occupied by snoring and odorous Koloftuma of the off shift—and individual rooms for officials.

Sainian led the Earthmen into one of the latter, furnished austere but not uncomfortably. While there was no art or grace to this cubicle, a comfortable bed and arm-chair, a heap of books, and a plentiful supply of cigars and falat-wine were in evidence.

Fallon introduced the two savants in languages that each understood, then said to Fredro, "You won't be able to fol-

low our conversation much, anyway. So if you don't mind, stand outside the door until we're finished, will you? Warn us if anybody starts to come in."

FREDRO groused but went. Fallon closed the door and pushed back his hood, saying, "Know me now, eh?"

"Nay, sir, that I do not... but stay! Are you verily a Krishnan or a Terran? You look like one of the latter disguised as the former..."

"You're getting close. Remember Hershid, four years ago?"

"By the superagency of the universe!" cried Sainian. "You're that Earthman, Antane bad-Faln, sometime Dour of Zamba!"

"I say, not so loud!" said Fallon. Sainian, because of his infirmity, had a tendency to bellow an ordinary conversation.

"Well, what in the name of all the nonexistent devils do you here?" said Sainian in a lower voice. "Have you truly become a priest of Yesht? Never did you strike me as one

who'd willingly submit to any cult's drug-dreams."

"I shall come to that. First, tell me: Are you down in this hole permanently, or can you come and go at will?"

"Ha! Then you cannot be an authentic priest, or you would know without the asking."

"Oh, I know you're clever. But how about the answer to my question?"

"As to that," said Sainian, lighting a cigar and pushing the box towards Fallon, "I am as free as an aqebat—in one of the cages in King Kir's zoo. I come and go as I please—as does a tree in the royal gardens. In short, I roam this small kingdom of the cellar of the Safq without let or hindrance. But so much as a motion towards escape is worth a pike in my chaudron, or a bolt in my back."

"Do you like that state of affairs?"

"TIS A RELATIVE matter, sir. To say I like this gloomy crypt as well as the opulent court of Hershid were tampering with the truth. To say I dislike it as ill as be-

ing flayed and broiled like one of those wretches the Yesh-tites employ in their major services were likewise less than utter verity. Relatively, you see. As I have ever maintained, such terms as 'like' are meaningless in any absolute sense. One must know what one likes better than..."

"Please!" Fallon, who knew his Krishnan, held up a hand. "Then I can count on you not to give me away?"

"Then it *is* some jape or masque, as I suspected! Fear not; your enterprises are nought to me, who tries to look upon the world with serene philosophical detachment. Albeit such traps as this wherein I presently find myself do sometimes render difficult that worthy enterprise. Did a chance present itself of dropping demented Kir into some convenient cesspool, I think mundane resentment would overcome the loftiest. "

"Yes, yes. But how did you get caught?"

"First, good sir, tell me what do *you* do in this cursed mew? Not mere idle curiosity, I trust?"

"I'm after information.

So..." Fallon, without going into the reason for wishing this information, briefly told of the methods by which he had penetrated the crypt.

"By Myande the Execrable! Hereafter I shall believe all tales I hear of the madness of Terrans. You had perhaps one chance in the hundred of getting this far without apprehension."

"Da'vi has stood by me this time," said Fallon.

"Whether she stands by you so staunchly on your way out is another matter whose outcome I eagerly await. I would not see your quivering body stretched upon the gruesome altar of Yesht."

FALLON asked, "Why do they combine worship with torture? Just for fun?"

"Not entirely. There was once an ancient superstition in the land, that by periodically slaying a victim in such wise that the wretch was made copiously to weep, the heavens—by the principles of sympathetic magic—would likewise be induced to weep, thereby causing the crops to grow. And in time this grim usage at-

tached itself to the worship of the earth-god Yesht. Now in these more sophisticated days, when Yesht has acquired a lofty hierarchy of servants and a tediously vast canon of theological literature, all is rationalized and justified on ecclesiological grounds, to wit: that so poignant a spectacle is needed to brand upon the worshipper's mind the divine truths purveyed by the cult. The truth is, in very fact, that many folk like to see others hurt—a quality wherein, if I read my Terran history aright, we're not so different from you. Will you have a beaker of wine?"

"Just one; don't tempt me with a second. If I have to fight my way out I shall need all my coordination. But let's have your story, now."

Sainian drew a deep breath and looked at the glowing end of his cigar. "Word came to me in Hershid that the Dour of Balhib was hiring the world's leading philosophers, at fabulous stipends, for a combined assault upon the mysteries of the universe. Being—like all men of intellect—somewhat of a fool in worldly affairs, I gave

up my professorship in the Imperial Lyceum, journeyed to Zanid, and took service under this addepleted monarch.

"**N**OW, MAD though he be, Kir did have one shrewd idea—unless, as some think, that cunning son-in-law of his, Chabarian, first put the burr in his drawers, as Ushnu did to Q a r a r in the myth of the pie of cast iron. Myself inclines to the Chabarian hypothesis, for the man once visited your Earth and picked up all sorts of exotic notions there. This particular idea was to collect such credulous lack-wits as myself, clap us up in these caves, ply us with liquor and damsels, and then inform us that we should either devise a thing wherewith to vanquish the Qaathians or end up on the smoking altars of Yesht. Faced with this grim alternative, mightily have we striven, and after three years of sweat and swink we have done what no others on this planet have hitherto accomplished."

"And that was?" said Fallon.

"We have devised a work-

able gun. Not so handy and quick at vomiting forth its deadly pellets as those of Earth, but yet a beginning. We knew about Terran guns; and though none had ever seen one in fact, we sought information from those who had—such as the Zambava whom you led in your rash raid into Gozashtand back in the reign of King Eqrar. From this we ascertained the basic principles: the hollow metal tube, the ball, the charge of explosive and means for igniting it. The tube with its wooden stock presented no great difficulties, nor did the bullets.

"The crux of the matter was the explosive. We were chapfallen to find that the spore-powder of the yasuvaplant, however lively in firecrackers and other pyrotechnics, was useless for our present purpose. After much experiment, the problem was solved by my colleague Nele-Jurdare of Katai-Jhogorai with a mixture of certain common substances; and thenceforth 'twas but a matter of cut-and-try."

"Stimulus-diffusion."

"What?"

"Never mind," said Fallon. "Just a Terran term I got from Fredro. Who was in on this project besides you?"

SAINIAN re-lit his cigar. "There were but two others worthy the name of philosopher: Nele-Jurdare—who, alas, perished in an accidental explosion of his mixture a while ago... What date is it by the way? With nought to tell the time by but the changing of the guard, one loses track."

Fallon told him, adding, "Before I forget, three Earthmen—Soares, Botkin, and Daly—have disappeared from Zanid in the last three years. Have you seen any sign of them? They weren't included in Chabarian's ordnance department, were they?"

"Nay, the only other is my colleague, Zarrash bad-Rau of Majbur. The other leaders in this enterprise were but high-class mechanics, five of 'em, Krishnans all. Of these, three have died of natural causes; the other two remain on as supervisors till, if Kir keeps his promise, these tubes have proved their might upon the

sanguinary field of battle, whereupon we shall be released with all the gold we can carry. Assuming, that is to say, the Dour does not cut our throats to silence us for certain, or that the Yeshtites do not track us down and slay us for knowing too much about their infernal cultus."

"Where's this Zarrash now?"

"**H**E HAS THE third chamber down. He and I are at the moment on terms of cold courtesy only."

"Why?" asked Fallon.

"Oh, a difference of opinion. A slight epistemological dissension, wherein Zarrash—as a realist transcendentalist—upheld the claims of deductive reasoning; whereas I as a nominalist-positivist was asserting those of inductive. Tempers rose; words flew—I recall 'specious quibbler' and 'sophistical solipsist' among others. Childish, I grant you, but long confinement frays the temper. We have been through this before—not only because of Zarrash's mystical idealism but also because of his incontinent garrulity. I can barely

get a word in. But withal, in a few days we find ourselves driven to reconciliation by sheer tedium of having nobody else with whom intelligently to converse."

Fallon asked, "Do you know what the explosives are made of?"

"Oh, aye. But think not I will babble the news to any lown that asks."

"You hope to sell that knowledge to some other Krishnan potentate—say the Dour of Gozashtand?"

Sainian smiled. "You may draw you own inferences, sir; I don't risk a straight answer before I am free of this trammel."

"What do you think of the coming of the gun to this planet?"

"Well, the late Nele-Jurdare deplored the whole enterprise, assisting but unwillingly to preserve his own gore. He maintained that to further such murderous novelties were a sin against one's fellow-being, unworthy of a true philosopher. Zarrash on t'other hand favors the gun on the ground it will end all war upon the planet, by making it too fright-

ful for men to contemplate—for all that it had not that effect in Terran history.”

“And you?”

“OH, I LOOK upon the matter from a somewhat different angle of vision: That until we Krishnans have some rough equality with you Terrans in force of arms, we cannot expect equality of treatment.”

“Why, what’s the matter with how you’ve been treated?”

“Nought is the matter, sir. Considering what you *could* have done, you’ve displayed exemplary moderation. But you’re a variable and various lot. You have furnished us on one hand with Barnevelt—a paragon of manly virtue who has put down the Sunqar pirates and atop of that brought us the boon of soap. On the other hand, there have been palpable swindlers like that Borel. Your methods of selecting those who shall visit us baffle us. On one hand you stop your men of science from imparting their knowledge of useful arts to us—lest by taking advantage thereof we des-

troy your comfortable superiority; whilst on the other hand, you unleash upon us a swarm of trouble-stirring missionaries and proselytizers for a hundred competing and contradictory religious sects, whose tenets are at least as absurd as those of our native cults.”

Fallon opened his mouth to speak, but Sainian rattled on. “You are, as I have said, more variable than we. No two of you are alike, wherefore no sooner have we adapted ourselves to one of you when he is replace by another of utterly different character. Take, for instance, when Masters Kennedy and Abreu—both credits to their species—retired at Novorecife and were replaced by those sottish barbarians Glumelin and Gorchakov. And your relations with us are at best those of a kindly and solicitous master to an inferior—who is not to be wantonly abused, but who will, if he knows what is well for him, bear himself in an acquiescent, and deferential manner towards his natural lord. Take this consul at Zanid—what’s his name...”

"I KNOW PERCY MJI-PA," said Fallon. "But look here: Aren't you afraid your planet will get pretty badly shot up? Or that whoever gets guns first will conquer all the other nations?"

"For the first contingency, a man is no deader when slain by a gun-bullet than when clouted by a club. And for the second, that were no ill to my way of thought. We need one government for the world—first because we *must* have it ere you will admit us to your hoity-toity Interplanetary Council; secondly because it gives us an advantage in dealing with you in any case. Prestige follows power, she does not precede, as says Nehavend."

"But shouldn't such a government come about as a result of voluntary agreement among the nations?" Fallon smiled at the realization that he, the cynical adventurer, was arguing for Terran political idealism, while Sainian, the unworldly philosopher, spoke for Machiavellian realism.

"You'll never get voluntary agreement in our present stage of culture, and well you know

it, Earthman. Why, if the aya-men of our nearest heavenly neighbor, the planet Qondyor—what do you Terrans call it?"

"Vishnu," said Fallon.

"I recall now; after some fribbling Terran deity, is it not? What I say is: if these rude savages invaded us—let's say brought hither in Terran space-ships for some recondite Terran reason—think you that even that threat would unite our several states? Nay; Gozashtand would seek revenge upon Mikardand for its defeat at Meozid; Suria and Dhaukia would see a chance to throw off the yoke of Qaath, and then each to erase the other; and so on down the list, each angling for the help of the invaders in extirpating its neighbor, indifferent to its own eventual fate.

"HAD WE ANOTHER thousand years wherein to advance at our natural gait, 'twere well; but such time is lacking. And, as I recall my Terran history, you fellows all but blew up your planet before you came to that happy degree of concord; and your

general level of culture was far ahead of our own at present. So, say I, let Kir of Balhib; or Kudair of Gozashtand; or the Senate of Katai-Jhogorai—whoever first lays hand upon this contrivance dire—let him, I say, grasp it firmly, beat the other thousand nations, feudal principalities, independent tribes, and lawless bands and gangs into submission, and then face the Terrans in the name of the united planet! We shall receive equal treatment when, and only when, we no longer have this multiplicity of independent sovereignties that you can play off, one against...”

“Excuse me, old man,” said Fallon, “but I’ve got to get back upstairs before my friend guarding the door goes off duty.”

He crushed out his cigar, rose, and opened the door. There was no sign of Fredro.

“*Bakh!*” Fallon breathed. “Either the fool’s gone off exploring on his own, or the guards have taken him! Come on, Sainian, show me around this warren. I must find my man.”

SAINIAN led Fallon briskly through the halls and rooms of the crypt. Fallon followed, shooting glances right and left from under his cowl into the many dark corners.

Sainian explained: “Here the guns are stored when finished and inspected... Here is the room where the barrels are bored true after forging... Here is the stock-making chamber. See how they carve and polish stocks of bolki-wood; Chabarian lured woodcarvers from Suruskand, for in this treeless land the art’s but feebly developed... Here the explosive is mixed...”

“Wait,” said Fallon, taking a closer look at the mixing process.

In the middle of the room a tailed Koloftu stood before a cauldron under which burned a small oil-flame. The cauldron contained what appeared to be molten asphalt. The Koloftu was measuring out with a dipper and pouring into the asphalt the materials from two barrels full of whitish powder, like fine sand, while with his other hand he gently stirred the mixture.

“Beware!” said Sainian.

"Disturb him not, lest we all be blown to shreds!"

But Fallon stepped nearer to the cauldron, thrust a finger into one of the barrels of powder, and tasted. Sugar!

Though no chemist, Fallon's store of general information—gathered in the course of his ninety-four years—informed him that the other barrel probably contained niter. In back of the Koloftu, Fallon could see a mold into which the mixture would be poured to harden into small blocks. But he could not linger to watch this process.

THEY SEARCHED through more chambers: some used by the workers for living, some for storage of raw materials, and some vacant. In one section of the labyrinth, they came upon a door with a member of the Royal Guard standing before it.

"What's in there?" said Fallon.

"'Tis the tunnel to the chapel across the street. In former times the priests used it for their convenience, especially in rainy weather. But now that the government has

rented their crypt, they must needs slop through the wet like common mortals."

As they searched, Fallon started as a trumpet-call reverberated through the caverns. There was a bustle of guards clanking about, the lamplight gleaming on their armor.

"The guard is changed at midnight," said Sainian. "Be that a matter of moment to you?"

"Hishkak, yes!" said Fallon. "Now we can't leave until tomorrow noon. You'll have to put us up."

"What? But my dear colleague, it would mean my head were I caught harboring you..."

"It'll mean your head if we're caught on our way out in any case, because you've been seen walking all over this place with me."

"Well then it were not irrational for me to seek a boon from you in turn. Does that conspiratorial wit of yours hold some plan for freeing me from these noisome toils?"

"You mean you want to escape?"

"Certes!"

"But then you'll forfeit all

this pay the government has supposedly been banking for you."

SAINIAN grinned and tapped his forehead. "My true fortune is in there. Promise to get me out—and Zarrash too if you can—and I'll hide you and your comrade. Though Zarrash be but an addlepatated animist, yet I would not leave a professional colleague in such a lurch."

"I'll do my best. Oh, there's the *fastuk* now!"

Having scoured almost the entire cellar, they came upon Dr. Julian Fredro. The archeologist was standing before a section of ancient wall near the exit stairs on which appeared a set of inscriptions, faint with age. In one hand he held a pad and in the other a pencil with which he was copying off the marks on the wall.

As Fallon approached with thunder on his face, Fredro looked up with a happy smile. "Look, Mr. F! Fallon! This looks like one of oldest parts of building, and the inscription may tell us when it was built..."

"Come along, you jackass!"

snarled Fallon under his breath. On their way back towards Sainian's quarters, he told Fredro what he thought of him, with embellishments.

Sainian said, "There is room for but one here, so I will put the other in Zarrash's chamber." He tapped with his knuckle on Zarrash's door-gong.

"What is it?" asked another elderly Krishnan, opening the door a crack.

Sainian explained. Zarrash slammed his door shut, saying through the wood, "Begone, benighted materialistic chatterbox! Seek not to lure me into any such scheme temerarious. I have woes enough without harboring spies."

"But 'tis your chance to escape from the Safq!" said Sainian.

"Oke? By Dashmok's paunch, that is an aya of a different gait," Zarrash reopened his door. "Come in, come in, ere you are overheard. What is that?"

SAINIAN explained in more detail, and Zarrash invited all to sit down to wine and cigars. Learning that Fredro was

a Terran savant, both philosophers began to ply him with questions.

Sainian said, "Now, touching this matter of inductive versus deductive reasoning, dear colleague from Earth, perhaps you can with your maturer wisdom shed light upon our difference. What is your rede?"

Thus the conversation took off into the realms of higher reasoning, leaving Fallon floundering badly several miles below. Fredro could not answer the Krishnans' questions about practical matters of invention and applied science, even had he wished to do so, because the conditioning that he had received at Novorecife tied his tongue every time he strayed in that forbidden direction. On more abstract matters he was free of this impediment, but suffered from the linguistic barrier, for his Balhibou was still rudimentary. Hence Fallon was forced to try to translate words like "enthymeme" and "epistemology" whose meaning he did not know to begin with.

And so on, far into the night.

THE FOLLOWING morning, Fallon felt the bristle upon his chin and looked at himself in Sainian's mirror. Had he known that he would be detained overnight he would have brought a razor, for no Earthman could pass as a Krishnan with an incipient beard of the full European or white-race type. Krishnan whiskers were usually so sparse that the owners pulled them out, hair by hair, with tweezers.

Sainian slipped in through the door of the chamber, bringing a plate on which were the elements of a plain Krishnan breakfast.

"Be not palsied with fright," said the philosopher, "but the Yeshtites search their temple for a brace of infidels said to have attended last night's mass, disguised in the habit of priests. The purpose of this intrusion and the identity of the intruders are not known; but since the doorkeepers swear that no such persons went out after the service, they must still be there. And they can't have descended into the crypt because the only door thereof is constantly guarded. I have

no notion, of course, who these miscreants might be."

"How did they find out?"

"Some one among them counted the capes of the third-class priests and found that two more had been employed than there were priests to wear them. It is their practice to scrutinize these trappings after each service to ascertain if any have disappeared, or become torn, or become so foul with use as to merit a wash. So, ere this mystery leads to wider stirrings and searchings, methinks you and Master Yulian had best aroint yourselves ere you bring disaster upon us all."

FALLON shivered at the thought of the bloody altar. "How long before noon?"

"About an hour."

"We shall have to wait until then."

"Wait, then, but stir not forth. I'll do my proper tasks, and tell you when the guards have changed again."

Fallon spent the next hour in solitary apprehension, alternately sitting and tapping his toe on the floor and nervous-

ly pacing as far as the confines of the small room permitted. He should have known that his phenomenal luck could not hold indefinitely. Now, if he did not get out soon, the war between Balhib and Qaath might boil up so that he could never collect from Qais—either because Ghuur's agent would not be around to report to, or because the information would have become too dated to be of use.

He blamed himself for getting involved with Qais of Babaal in the first place—but where else could he have obtained, in a short time, the large sums needed to set him on the road to Zamba again? That was all he really cared about.

He thought of his many mistakes and missed opportunities: of jobs lost; money squandered; wives abandoned or alienated. What was wrong with him, anyway? He was neither stupid nor a monster of vice and cruelty.

(The fact was that, though a man of many promising attributes, Anthony Fallon had a dishonest, irresponsible, anti-social streak that had ruined

all his prospects. But he never admitted this. When he had lied or cheated or stolen, it had always seemed to him that he was acting under compulsion—that he had no other choice.)

If he had only been satisfied the first time he'd become the King of Zamba, and not tried to conquer Gozashtand, he might still be ruling that lovely isle in the emerald Sadabao Sea, with the black-haired Julnar at his side.

HE HAD NOT thought much lately about Julnar Batruni. Now there was a real woman... A bit headstrong, perhaps, but so far above the many others. Where was she now? He did not know. When they parted she had told him that she was going back to Earth with her father, that retired Syrian textile-magnate. She had no doubt divorced Fallon and married again.

It all seemed so long ago that the emotions connected with these events had smoldered down to ashes. He no longer even hated Hasselborg, that investigator who had tripped him up in the Gozashtand episode, and had later

gone back to Earth and married his, Fallon's former first wife Alexandra. Why, even if he had stayed with the British Broadcasting Company, living in a flat in Kensington with Alexandra, he'd be better off...

Sainian put his head in the door, saying: "The guards have been changed."

Fallon pulled his hood well down over his face, glided out with the shuffling walk of the priests of Yesht, and gathered up Fredo in Zarrash's room. They headed for the exit stairway. The crypt was still lit by oil-lamps and the glow of furnaces, just as it had been before; there was no way to tell day from night. When Fredo sighted the carving that he'd been copying the night before, when Fallon had found him and dragged him off, he wanted to stop to complete his transcription.

"Do what you like," snarled Fallon. "I'm getting out."

He mounted the stairs, hearing Fredro's disgruntled shuffle behind him. At the top of the flight he came to the big iron door. With a final glance

around, Fallon smote the door with his fist.

After a few seconds there was a clank as the outer bolt slid back, and the door creaked open. Fallon found himself facing a trooper of the Civic Guard in uniform—but not Girej. This Krishnan was a stranger.

IX

FOR THREE seconds they stared at one another. Then the guard started to bring up his halberd, at the same time turning his head to call out, "*Ohe!* You there! I think these are the men for whom..."

At this instant Fallon kicked him expertly in the crotch, a form of attack to which Krishnans—despite many anatomical differences—are just as vulnerable as Earthmen. As the man yelled and doubled over, Fallon reached around the edge of the door and extracted the big key. Then he slammed the door and shot home the bolt on the stair side, so that those in the temple could not open it unless they either broke it down or found another key.

"What is?" said Fredro behind him.

Without bothering to explain, Fallon pocketed the key and trotted down the stairs. At such desperate moments he was at his best; as they reached the bottom there was a loud bang as something struck the door from the other side.

Fallon, calling upon his recollection of his tour of the crypt the previous night with Sainian, picked his way through the complex towards the tunnel entrance. Twice he went astray, but found his way again after scurrying about the passages like a rat in a psychologist's maze.

Behind him Fallon heard a scurry of feet on the stair and a clatter of weapons. Evidently the door had been opened.

At last he sighted the guard in front of the tunnel door. Fallon walked straight towards the Krishnan, who hoisted his halberd warily. Fallon kept right on, waving his arms and crying out, "Run for your life! There's a fire in the explosives-room, and we shall all be blown to bits!"

FALLON had to repeat before the guard got the idea. Then the fellow's eyes goggled with horror; he dropped his halberd with a clatter and turned to unlock the door behind him.

The bolt had snicked back and the door was opening when Fallon, who had picked up the halberd, swung it so that the flat of the ax-head smote the guard on the helmet with a crashing *bong*. The man went down under the blow, half-stunned, and Fallon and Fredro slipped through the door.

Fallon started to shut the door, then realized that, first, the guard's body was lying in it; and second that if he did, the tunnel would be in total darkness. He could either leave it ajar, or drag the guard's body out of the way, take one of the lamps down from its bracket on the wall of the crypt, and close the door behind him.

The clatter of approaching footsteps convinced him that he would not have time to carry out this maneuver. So he took the key, leaving the door

open, and turned into the tunnel, saying, "Now run!"

The two Earthmen gathered up the skirts of their robes and ran along the rough rock floor, sometimes stumbling on an irregularity. As they ran, the light from the door behind them diminishing with distance.

"Be caref..."

FALLON started to speak, but ran headlong into another door in the darkness. He bumped his big nose and cracked a knee-cap.

Cursing in several languages he felt around until he found the handle. When the door did not yield to mere pulling and pushing, he located the keyhole by feel and tried his two keys. One of them worked; the bolt on the far side slid back.

Noises from the other end of the tunnel indicated that their pursuers had found the felled guard.

"Hurry up, please!" whimpered Fredro between pants.

Fallon opened the door. They entered a room that was almost dark, but feebly lit by gleams of daylight that came down a stair-well. The walls

were covered with shelves on which were untidily stacked vast numbers of books—Krishnan books with wooden covers and a long strip of paper folded zigzag between them. Fallon thought that he recognized them as the standard prayer-books of the cult of Yesht, but he had no time to investigate. The tunnel was echoing to the tramp of many running feet.

The Earthmen bounded up the stair, finding themselves on the ground floor of the Chapel of Yesht. Fallon, moving silently now, holding his scabbard through his robe lest it clank, neither saw nor heard any sign of life.

They went down a hallway, past rooms with rows of chairs set up in them, and presently found themselves in the vestibule just inside the front doors. The doors were bolted from inside, and Fallon slid back the bolt and opened one door.

A LIGHT rain slanted across the wet cobblestones and sprinkled Fallon's face. Few pedestrians seemed to be walking the street. Fallon

whispered, "Come on! We'll slip out and around the corner to leave these robes. Then when the guards get here we shall be walking *towards* them."

Fallon slunk out the door and flitted down the stone steps and around the corner of the building into the narrow space between the chapel and the adjoining house. Here an ornamental shrub screened them from the street. They slipped off their robes, rolled them into small bundles, tied them up with their belt-cords, and tossed them into the top of the shrub where they were above eye-level and so might be overlooked. Then they walked quickly out to the street, turned, and were strolling past the front of the chapel when the door flew open again and a gaggle of guards and priests boiled out and clattered down the steps, peering into the rain, pointing, and shouting at one another.

Fallon, one fist on his hip and the other hand on his hilt, surveyed the pursuers with a lordly air as they came down the steps towards him. He gave them a little bow and a speech

in his most grandiloquent Krishnan style, "Hail, good my sirs. May I venture to offer assistance in the worthy search upon which you appear to be so assiduously engaged?"

A guard panted at him: "Saw—saw you two men in the dress of priests of Yesht come out of yon portal even now?"

Fallon turned to Fredro with raised eyebrows. "Did we see anything like that?"

FREDO SPREAD his hands and shrugged. Fallon said, "Though it grieves me so to confess, sir, neither my companion nor I noticed anything of the sort. But we've only just now arrived here; the fugitives might have left the building earlier."

"Well then..." began the Krishnan, but then another Krishnan who had hustled up during the colloquy said, "Hold, Yugach! Be not so ready to take the word of every passing stranger—especially inhuman alien creatures such as these. How know we they're not those for whom we seek?"

The other Krishnans, at-

tracted by the argument, began crowding around with bared weapons. Fallon's heart sank into his soft-leathered Krishnan boots. So close to freedom they had been! Fredro's mouth opened and closed in silence, like that of a fish in stale water.

"Who be ye, Earthmen?" said the first Krishnan.

"I'm Antane bad-Faln, of the Juru..."

The second Krishnan interrupted: "*Iya!* A thousand pardons, my masters; nay, a million, for not having known you. I was in the House of Justice when you testified against the robber Shave and his accomplice, the same which died of the wound ye so courageously dealt in apprehending him. Nay, Yugach; I'm wrong. This Antane's one of our staunchest trees of law and order—despite his alien origin—and a squad-leader in the Guard besides. Ne're would he demean himself by such furtive forays. But come, sir, help us to search!"

THE GUARD turned to shout directions to his fellows. For a quarter-hour Fal-

lon and Fredo helped to hunt for themselves around the base of the chapel, peering behind architectural ornamentation and poking swords into the shrubbery. At length, when the search appeared hopeless, the two Earthmen strolled off.

When they were out of earshot of the chapel, where the baffled searchers had gathered on the steps in a gesticulating knot, Fredro asked, "Is it all over? I can go back to hotel now?"

"Absolutely. But when you write a report for the Psh—for that magazine of yours, don't mention me. And tell Percy Mjipa your story, saying we saw no trace of his missing Earthmen."

"I understand. Thank you, thank you, Mr. Fallon, for your help. A friend in need saves nine. Thank you, and good-bye!"

Fredro wrung Fallon's hand in both of his and looked around for a khizun to hail.

"You'll have to take a bus," said Fallon. "It's just like Earth. The minute a drop of rain falls all the cabs disappear. Cheerio!"

He left Fredro and walked

westward with the idea of going directly to Tashin's Inn to report to Qais, before events swept his news into obsolescence. He was getting wetter by the minute, and regretted the fine new rain-cloak lying by the front door of the Safq—he could almost see it from where he was. But he was not so foolhardy as to try to recover it now.

BY THE TIME he got the Square of Qarar, however, he was limping from the knock that he had given his knee in the tunnel, and so wet and miserable that he decided to go home, get a drink, and change his clothes before proceeding further. He had an old winter over-tunic there which he could use to keep dry with thereafter, and this would mean only a slight detour.

As he plodded through the rain, head down, the sound of a drum caused him to look around. Down Asada Street marched a column of civic guards with pikes on their shoulders, the drummer beating time at their head. From the two white bands on each sleeve of their jackets Fallon

recognized them as belonging to the Gabanj Company. Representing the city's richest residential district, they showed no lack of spit-and-polish. His own Juru Company would look like scarecrows by comparison.

A few pedestrians lined the sides of the street to watch the column go past. Fallon asked a couple what the parade portended, but nobody could give him a plausible answer. He suspected that new developments in the Qaathian situation were responsible, and that they had also been responsible for Girej's not being at his post as promised.

When the militiamen had gone, Fallon trudged on homeward. He was just opening his door when a voice said, "Master Antane!"

IT WAS CISASA, the Osirian guardsman, with his antique helmet precariously held to the top of his reptilian head by the chin-strap and a Krishnan sword hanging awkwardly from a baldric over his shoulder, if he could be said to have a shoulder.

He went on in his weirdly accented Balhibou, "Fetch

your kear at once and come with me to the armory. The Churu Company is ordered out!"

"Why? Is the war on?"

"I know not; I do but pass on the orders."

Oh, Bakh! thought Fallon. *Why did this have to happen at this particular moment?* The goddess Da'vi must have taken a particular dislike to him. He said, "Very well, Cisasa. Run along and I shall be with you in a few moments."

"Your parton, sir, but that I'm forpitten to do; I'm to escort you in person."

Fallon had hoped to slip away to continue his visit to Qais; but evidently Kordaq had foreseen that some of his guardsmen might try to make themselves scarce at mobilization, and had taken measures to forestall such absences. It was no use running away from Cisasa, who could outrun any Terran ever born; nor would it do to attack him, even had Fallon been so desperate as to consider doing so. This intelligent dinosaur was as strong as three men. Nor did Fallon's house have a back door out of which he could slip.

FALLON'S aversion to being called up was due, not to cowardice—he did not mind a good battle—but to fear that he would never, then, be able to collect from Qais, and thus have to start building his filibustering fund all over again.

"Oh, very well," he said wearily. "Come on in while I get my gear."

"Pray hasten, goot my sir," for I've three more to fetch after I've deliffered you. Have you no red jacket?"

"No, and I haven't had time to get one," said Fallon, rummaging for his field-boots. "Will you have a drink before we go?"

He might, he thought, get the fellow so reeling drunk that he could give him the slip. Osirians were notoriously susceptible to the lure of alcohol.

"No thank you. Duty first! I am wilty excited. Are you not excited too?"

"Positively palpitating," grumbled Fallon, rolling a blanket into a tight roll with a few personal items such as extra socks inside. "Help me to pin this thing in place."

The Osirian complied. With the blanket-roll encircling his

body, over one shoulder and under the other, Fallon gathered up his remaining gear and strapped on his helmet. Then they went out and headed for the armory.

"At last we can be true heroes!" gargled Cisasa, doing a kind of dance-step to indicate his enthusiasm. "Avaunt, sirs! Have at you, file parparian!" He made imaginary thrusting motions. "Of course with a few Osirian shock-guns I could mow down the whole Qaathian army, but this is more romantic."

"Romance, humph!" said Fallon.

THE ARMORY was crowded with the entire Juru Company, or at least all of those that had arrived; late-comers were being brought in every minute. Kordaq sat with his spectacles on at his desk, in front of which stood a line of guardsmen waiting to beg off from active service.

Kordaq heard each one out and decided quickly, usually against the plea for exemption. Those whose excuses he found frivolous he sent away with a stinging tirade on the coward-

ice of this generation compared to the heroic Balhibo ancestors. Those who claimed to be sick were given a quick examination by Qouran, the neighborhood physician, whose method seemed to be to count eyes, hands, and feet.

Fallon went over to where about two hundred of the new muskets were stacked against the wall. Other guardsmen were crowding around them, handling them and speculating as to how these things were to be used. He was turning one of the firearms over and sighting along the barrel—it had sights, he was glad to observe—when Kordaq's voice roared through the armory:

"Attention! Put those guns down and get back against the other wall, all of you, while in a few words I convey to you that which I must say."

FALLON, knowing the Krishnan habit of never using one word where ten would serve, braced himself for a long speech.

Kordaq continued, "As most of you know, the armies of barbarous Qaath have now swept across the sacred bourne

of fair Balhib and are advancing upon Zanid. The holy duty therefore falls to us to smite them sore and hurl them back to those parched regions whence they came. And here before you are the means, whereof I've hinted heretofore: These are true and veritable guns, such as those the mighty Terrans use, devised and fabricated here in Zanid secretly.

"If you wonder why the Juru Company, of all in Zanid the most irregularous, should be among the few chosen to bear this new weapon—for there are enough for three companies only—I'll tell you straight. As says Nehavend, scorn not the pebble on the road, for it may be a diamond uncut. Firstly 'tis known that our pike-drill's abominable and our archery worse, whereas those of some other companies of the Guards are almost up to the standards of the mailed serjeants of the Regulars. 'Twere ill-advised, then, to deprive the army of such puissance as the pikes and bolts of these others provide. Secondly, by the very fact that this company includes beings from other planets—where such fearsome lethal toys are

commonplace—makes us all the more adaptable to this end. Thus these foreigners—I speak particularly of Earthmen and Osirians—can serve as a ready-made force of instructors in the use of guns.

“Did time permit, ’twould advantageous be to spend a number of days in practice; but the emergency o’errides our wishes. We must therefore march out at once and snatch such practice as we can enroute to the field of blood. Mark me well, though: there shall be no casual shooting without specific orders, for the quantity of bullets and explosive is limited and must be expended with strict penurious thrift. Do I catch any guard banging away unauthorized at stump and stone, I’ll truss him and use him for a target at official exercise.

“Now for the manner whereby these things are used. Har-sun, set up that bag of sand ’gainst yonder wall. Now attend me closely, heroes, whilst, though a man of few words, I strive in my inarticulate way to make these operations as clear as desert air.”

KORDAQ picked up a musket and proceeded to explain how it was loaded and fired. It transpired that, in the absence of any trigger mechanism, the musketeers were expected to discharge their pieces by touching to the firing-pans lighted cigars held in their teeth. Fallon had a prevision of some bloody noses before they learned to master the recoil of the guns.

One of the guardsmen said, “Well, meseems we get free smokes, at least.”

Kordaq frowned at such levity and, having loaded his piece and lighted his cigar, aimed at the sandbag set up against the far wall and touched off his charge.

Bang!”

The armory’s rafters rang with the explosion. The kick of the musket staggered the captain, and from the muzzle bloomed a vast cloud of black, choking smoke. A hole appeared in the sandbag. Fallon, coughing with the rest, reflected that while the asphalt-sugar-niter mixture evidently would explode, it might work better as smoke-screen materi-

al than as a propellant for ordnance.

The Krishnans in the company jumped violently. Several screamed with fright. Some shouted that they would be afraid to handle any such Dupulan's device as that. Others clamored for the good old pike and crossbow, which all understood. Kordaq quieted the hubub and went on with his demonstration emphasizing the importance of keeping one's explosive dry and one's barrel clean and oiled.

"Now," he said, "have you any queries?"

THEY HAD. The Thothians objected that they were too small to handle such heavy weapons, while the Osirians pointed out that tobacco-smoke threw them into a paroxysm of coughing, wherefore they never used the weed. Both arguments were allowed after much discussion, and it was decided that these species should retain their bills. After all, Kordaq told them, the company would need a few billmen to protect it, "lest for all our lightnings and thunders the roynish foe win to hand-play."

There remained the lone Isidian to dispose of—for while its elephantine trunk was efficient enough to catching thieves on the streets of Zanid, the creature was not quite up to manipulating a muzzle-loading arquebus. Fallon remembered his conversation with Mjipa, and suggested making the Isidian the standard-bearer. Accepted.

The rain had ceased, and Roqir was breaking through the overcast, when the Juru Company marched out of the armory, with Captain Kordaq, the drummer, and the Isidian flag-bearer at their head, muskets and bills on their shoulders, and mailshirts clinking. With the afternoon sun in their eyes, and the wind from the steppes in their faces, they streamed through the slums of the western Juru, out the Geklan Gate, across the bridge that spanned the Eshqa, and along the Jo'ol Road across the boundless western plain.

THE BALHIBO army lay at Chos, a crossroads in western Balhib. Fallon, having the guard, walked slowly around the perimeter of the area as-

signed to the Civic Guard of Zanid, a musket on his shoulder. The Guard had the extreme northerly position in the encampment. Another regiment occupied the adjacent area, and another beyond that, and so on.

Krishnan military organization was much simpler than Terran, without the elaborate hierarchy of officers or the sharp distinction between officers and non-commissioned officers. Fallon was a squad-leader. Above him was Savaich, the tavern-keeper; as senior squad-leader of the section, he had limited powers over the whole section. Over Savaich was Captain Kordaq (the title of rank could be as well translated as "Major" or even "Lieutenant-Colonel") who commanded the Juru Company.

Above Kordaq was Lord Chindor who commanded the whole Guard; and above Chindor nobody but Minister Charbarian, who commanded the entire army. The army was theoretically organized in tens—ten-man squads, ten-squad sections or platoons, and so on. In practice, however,

the numbers were seldom those of this theoretical desideratum. Thus the Juru Company, with a paper strength of a thousand plus, actually mustered less than two hundred on the battle-field, and it was about an average company. Staff work and supply and medical arrangements were of the simplest.

So far, Fallon and his squad had been adequately, if monotonously, fed. Fallon had not seen a map of the region in which they were travelling; but that mattered little because as far as one could see in all directions there was nothing but the gently rolling prairie with its waving cover of plants, something like Terran grasses in appearance, though biologically more like long-stemmed mosses.

FROM OVER the horizon a thin pencil of black smoke slanted up into the turquoise sky, where Ghuur's raiders had burned a village. Such cavalry-raids had struck deep into Balhib already. But the Qaathians could not take the walled cities with cavalry

alone, nor could they build siege-engines on the spot, in a land where the only trees were grown from seeds imported and planted and kept alive by frequent watering. That meant that they would have to bring a siege-train with their main army, and they would have to come by the road that the Balhibo army now strattled.

All this Fallon either knew from rumors that he had picked up or surmised from his previous military experience. Now to his ears came the creak of supply-wagons, the animal noises of cavalry mounts, the hammering of smiths repairing things, the shrill cries of a tribe of the Gypsy-like Gavehona who had attached themselves to the army as camp-followers, the popping of muskets off beyond a nearby rise, as Kordaq doled out the day's sparing allowance of target powder and shot. In the six days since they had left Zanid, the Juru Company had acquired a nodding acquaintance with their new weapons. Even if they were hardly qualified as marksmen, most of them could now hit a man-sized target at twenty paces.

SO FAR, THERE had been two killed and five wounded—four gravely—in musket accidents. Of the two fatalities, one's gun had blown up, as a result either of faulty manufacture or of double-charging. The other had been shot through the head on the target-range by a musketeer who failed to notice where he was pointing his piece. All seven casualties had occurred among the Krishnans of the company. The non-Krishnans were either more careful, or more accustomed to firearms.

A spot of dust appeared above the prairie, about where the westward road would be. It grew, and out of it appeared a rider loping along on an aya, having the misfortune to have his dust-cloud blown along by the breeze at just his own speed. Fallon saw the fellow gallop into the camp and disappear from sight among the tents. This happened often enough, though sooner or later, he knew, the arrival would bear portentous news.

Well, this seemed to be the occasion, for a trumpet blew, riders galloped hither and yon, and Fallon saw the musketeers

come marching back over the rise to camp. He, too, walked over to where the Juru Company's standard rose amid the tents. The troopers of the company were whetting swords, polishing helmets, and pushing oiled rags into their musket-barrels.

Just as Fallon arrived, the little drummer—a short-tailed freedman from the forest of Jaega—beat “fall in”. With much clatter and last-minute rummaging for gear, the company slowly pulled itself together. Fallon was almost the first of the third section to arrive in his place.

AT LAST they were all in place—except a couple. Cursing, Kordaq sent Cisasa over to the tents of the Gavehona, suspecting that the missing men might be dallying with the Gavehone women, that being one of the many questionable ways in which this peripathetic people made their living.

Meanwhile a troop of cavalry galloped westward along the road trailing a rope, to the end of which was attached a rocket-gliders, for Chabarian had

hired a number of these primitive aircraft and their pilots from Sotaspe for scouting. The craft rose like a kite. When the pilot found an updraft, he cast off the rope and ignited the first of his rockets which, burning the spores of the yasuvaplant, pushed the craft along.

Then the Juru Company stood and stood. Cisasa returned with the missing men. Krishnans on ayas galloped back and forth bearing messages. Officers, their gilded armor blinding in the bright sun, conferred out of earshot of the troops. Two of the companies of the Zanid Guard were wheeled out of line and marched across the front of the army to reinforce the left wing.

Fallon, leaning boredly on his musket, reflected that things had been different when he had commanded an army and so had had a fair notion of what was happening. In his humble corporalship nobody bothered to explain anything to him. He had, so to speak, started at the top and worked his way down in military rank. If he ever again acquired an army of his own, he would try to

keep his soldiers better informed.

About him the men yawned, fidgeted, and gossiped: "'Tis said the Kamuran has a kind of mechanical bishtar, worked by machinery and sheathed in iron armor..." "They say the Jungava have a fleet of flying galley-ships which, fanning the air with oars like wings, will hover over us and lapidate us with weighty stones..." "I hear Minister Chabarian has been beheaded for treason!" "Nay, look yonder; there he goes upon his aya..."

FINALLY, more than an hour after falling in, there came a great blaring of trumpets and banging of gongs and beating of drums, and the army began to move forward. Fallon, tramping through the long moss-grass with the rest, saw that the commanders were getting the array into the shape of a huge crescent with the horns, of which the Zanid Guard was the right-hand tip, pointing westward towards the enemy. The musketeers had been massed at the tips of the crescent, with the more conventional units of pikemen and

crossbowmen in between, while behind the crescent Chabarian had placed his cavalry. He had a squadron of bishtars, but kept them well back, for these elephantine beasts were too temperamental to be used rashly, and were prone to stampede back through their own army.

When they had marched so that the tents were mere dots against the eastern horizon they halted and stood again, while the officers straightened out irregularities in the line. There was nothing for Fallon to see except the waving of the moss-grass in the breeze and a glider circling overhead in the greenish-blue sky against the bright-yellow disk of Roqir.

The Juru Company was moved a little to place it atop a rise. Now one could see farther, but all there was to see was the surface of the olive-green plain, rippling like water as the breeze bowed the moss-grass. Fallon ran his eye along the crescent and guessed the total force as in the neighborhood of thirty thousand.

NOW HE COULD see the road, along which more

dust-clouds appeared. This time whole squadrons of riders were moving along it. Others popped up above the horizon, like little black dots at first, on other sides. Fallon inferred from their behavior that they were Balhibo scouts retreating before the advance of the Jungava.

Then more waiting; then more Balhibo riders. And quite suddenly, a pair of riders a few hundred paces away were circling and fighting, their swords flashing like needles in the sun. Fallon could not see clearly what happened, but one fell off his mount and the other galloped away, so the Balhibu must have lost the duel.

And finally the horizon crawled with dots that slowly grew into squadrons of the steppe-dwellers spread out across the plain.

Kordaq said, "Juru Company! Load your pieces! Light your cigars!"

But then the enemy stopped and seemed to be milling around with no clear purpose. A group of them detached themselves from the rest and galloped in a wide sweep that took them past the Juru Com-

pany, yelping and loosing arrows as they went, but from such a distance that nearly all the shafts fell short. One did glance with a sharp metallic sound from the helmet of a trooper, but without doing further harm. Fallon could not see them too clearly, but he could discern that some wore fur hats while others were bare-headed, displaying scalps shaven but for a scalp-lock tied with bright ribbons.

From the left end of the line came a single report of a musket and a cloud of smoke.

"Fool!" cried Kordaq. "Hold your fire, hold your fire! He could not hit a mountain at that distance, and he'll give away our surprise."

THEN WITH a tremendous racket the Qaathian army got into forward motion again. Fallon had a glimpse of phalanx of spearmen marching down the road towards the center of the Balhibo line, where Kir's royal guard was posted. The phalanx was no doubt composed of Surians, or Dhaukians, or some other ally, as the Qaathian force was said to be entirely mounted. Other

forces, mounted and afoot, could be seen moving hither and thither. Clouds of arrows and bolts filled the intervening air, the snap of the bowstrings and the whizz of the missiles providing a kind of orchestral accompaniment to the rising din of battle.

But the scene became too obscured by dust for Fallon to make much of it from where he stood, besides which the Juru Company would soon have its hands full with its own battle.

A huge force of mounted archers on aya's thundered towards the right tip of the crescent. Kordaq, shouting to make himself heard, cried, "Are you all loaded, lit, and ready? Prepare to fire. Front rank, kneel!"

The first two ranks raised their muskets, the men of the second aiming over the heads of the first. At the end of the line Kordaq sat on his aya with his sword on high.

Arrows began to swish past. A couple thudded into targets. The approaching cavalry was close enough for Fallon, aiming his musket like the rest, to see the antennae sprouting

from their foreheads when Kordaq shrieked "Give fire!" and lowered his sword.

THE MUSKETS went off in a long ragged volley that completely hid the view in front of the company behind a vast pall of stinking brownish smoke. Fallon heard cries beyond the smoke.

Then the breeze wafted the smoke back over the company and the atmosphere cleared. The great mass of aya-archers was streaming off to the right around the end of the line. Fallon saw several aya's kicking in the moss-grass before the company, and a couple more running with empty saddles. But he could not count the total casualties because the moss-grass hid the fallen riders.

"Third and fourth ranks, step up!" shouted Kordaq.

The third and fourth ranks squeezed forward between the men in front of them, who retired to re-load.

From somewhere to the south came the sound of another volley of musketry as the left end of the line let go in its turn, but Fallon could see nothing. Behind the company rose

a furious din. Looking back he saw that a large part of the mounted archers had swept around behind the Balhibo foot, but here had been set upon by one of the bodies of Balhibo cavalry. Kordaq ordered the Osirians and Thothians, who were standing in clumps behind the line of musketeers and leaning on their bills, to form a decent line to protect the company from an attack in the rear.

Meanwhile, another force appeared in front of the Juru Company; this was mounted on the tall shomals (beasts something like humpless camels) and carrying long lances. As they galloped forward the leading ranks again brought up their pieces. Again the crackling volley and the cloud of smoke; and when the smoke had cleared, the shomal-riders were nowhere to be seen.

THEN NOBODY bothered the Juru Company for a time. The middle of the Balhibo line was hidden in dust and sent up a terrific din as spearmen and archers locked in close combat swayed back and forth over the bodies of the

slain and hewed and thrust at one another; the plain shook with charges and counter-charges of cavalry.

Fallon hoped that Prince Chabarian knew more about what was going on than he did.

Then Kordaq called his company to attention again as a mass of hostile pikemen materialized out of the dust-clouds, coming for the Zaniduma at a run. The first musketry volley shook the oncoming spearmen, but the pressure of those behind kept the mass moving forward. The second volley tore great holes in their front rank, but still they came on.

The first two ranks of musketeers were still back loading; the guns of the others had just been emptied. Kordaq ordered the bills forward, and the Osirians and Thothians squeezed through the ranks to the front.

"Charge!" shouted Kordaq.

The Osirians and Thothians advanced down the slope. Behind them the musketeers dropped their muskets, drew their swords, and followed. The sight of all the non-Krishnans rushing upon them seemed to unnerve the pikemen, for they

stopped their charge, broke up, and ran off, dropping their pikes and yelling that devils and monsters were after them.

KORDAQ called his company back to the hilltop, riding around in circles like an agitated sheep-dog and beating with the flat of his sword those of his men who showed a disposition to chase the enemy clear back to Qaath.

They re-formed on the hilltop, picking up and reloading their muskets. The sight of all the corpses that now littered the gentle slope before them seemed to have heartened them.

The day wore on. Kordaq sent an Osirian to fetch water. The company beat off three more cavalry charges from different directions. Fallon surmised that they did not have to hit any opponents to accomplish that; the noise and smoke alone would stampede the ayas and shomals. For a while, the fighting in the center seemed to have died down. Then its pace quickened again.

Fallon said, "Captain, what's the disturbance down towards the center?"

"They've been disturbed ever since the first onset... But hold; something's toward! Meseems men of our coat do flee back along the road to home, mauger the cavalry rides them down and strives to beat them back into line. What can it be, that having so stoutly withstood the shock and struggle so long, they've now turned faint of liver?"

A mounted messenger came up and conferred with Lord Chindor, who cantered over to Kordaq, shouting, "Take your gunners across the rear of our host to the center of the line, and speedily! The Jungava have disclosed a strange, portentous thing! This messenger shall guide you!"

KORDAQ formed up his company and led them in a quick march out behind the lines and southward across the rear. Here and there were clusters of wounded and mangled Krishnans, on whom the army's handful of surgeons worked as they could get around to them—though the number was many times what they could cope with. To the Juru Company's right stood

the units of balestiers and pikemen, battered and thinned—the greenish tinge of the Krishnans' skins hidden under a caking of dust down which drops of sweat eroded serpentine channels. They leaned upon their weapons and panted, or sat on convenient corpses. The moss-grass was trampled flat and stained purplish-brown with Krishnan blood.

Toward the middle of the line, the noise and dust began to rise again. The soldiers in the line were crowding to look over each other's shoulders towards something out of sight. Then the cross-bowmen were shooting into the murk.

"This way," said the messenger, wheeling his aya and pointing to a gap in the line.

Kordaq on his aya, the drummer, and the Isidian standard bearer led the company through the line and deployed them to face the foe. At once Fallon saw the "thing".

It looked like a huge wooden box, the size of a large tent, and it rolled forward slowly on six large wheels, which were however almost entirely hidden by the thick qong-wood

sides. On top was a superstructure with a hole in front; and behind the superstructure rose a short length of pipe. As the contraption crept forward at a slow walk, the pipe puffed clouds of mixed smoke and steam—puff-puff-puff-puff.

"By God," said Fallon, "they've got a *tank*!"

"What said you, Master Antane?" asked the Krishnan next to him, and Fallon realized that he had spoken in English.

"Merely a prayer to my Terran deities," he said. "Hurry up; straighten out the line."

"Prepare to fire!" shouted Kordaq.

THE TANK puff-puffed on, closer and closer. It was not headed for the Juru Company, but for a point in the Balhibo line south of it. Its qong-wood sides bristled with arrows and bolts stuck in the hard wood. Behind it crowded a mass of hostile sodiery. And now, out of the dust, another tank could be seen, farther down the line.

A loud *thump* came from the nearest tank. An iron ball

whizzed from the aperture at the front of the superstructure and into the midst of the block of pikemen facing it. There was a stir in the mass. Pikes toppled and men screamed. The whole mass started to flow formlessly back from the line.

The muskets of the Juru Company crashed, spattering the side of the tank with balls. When the smoke had blown away, however, Fallon saw that the tank had not been materially damaged. There was a grinding of gears and the thing backed up a few feet, turning as it did so, and started forward again, continuing to turn until it pointed right towards the company.

"Another volley!" screamed Kordaq.

But then the *thump* came again, and the iron ball streaked in amongst the Juru Company. It struck Kordaq's aya in the chest, hurling the beast over backwards and sending the captain flying. Then, rebounding, the ball struck the Isidian in the head and killed the eight-legged standard-bearer. The standard fell.

FALLON got in one well-aimed shot at the aperture on the tank, and then looked around to see his company breaking up, crying: "All's lost!" "We're fordone!" "Every wight for himself!"

A few more shots were fired wildly, and the Juru Company streamed back through the gap in its own lines. The tank swung its nose towards the line of Balhibo pikemen again.

Thump! Down went more pikes. And Fallon, as he ran with the rest, had a glimpse of a third tank.

Then he was running in a vast disorganized mass of fugitives — musketeers, pikemen, and crossbowmen all mixed in together, while after them poured the hordes of the invaders. He stumbled over bodies and saw on both sides of him mounted Qaathians ride past him into the mass, hacking right and left with their scimitars. He dropped the musket, for he was practically out of powder and shot; and with the collapse of the Balhibo army he would have no chance to replenish his supply. Here and there, groups of Balhibo caval-

ry held together and skirmished with the steppe-folk, but the infantry were hopelessly broken.

The press thinned out somewhat as the faster runners drew ahead of the slower and the pursuers tore into the fugitives, slaying and slaying. Behind and above Fallon's right shoulder a voice shouted in Qaathian. Fallon looked around and saw one of the furhatted fellows sitting on an aya and brandishing a scimitar. Fallon could not understand the sentence but caught the questioning inflection and the words "Qaath" and "Balhib". Evidently the Qaathian was not sure which army Fallon, lacking a proper uniform, belonged to.

"Three cheers for London!" cried Fallon, and caught the Qaathian's booted leg and heaved. Out of the saddle went the Krishnan, to land on his fur hat, and into it went Anthony Fallon. He turned his mount's head northward, at right angles to the general direction of rout and pursuit, and kicked the beast to a gallop.

X

FOUR DAYS later, having detoured around the battle zone to the north, Fallon reached Zanid. The Geklan Gate was jammed with Krishnans struggling to get in: runaway soldiers from the Battle of Chos, and country folk seeking the city as a refuge.

The guards at the gate asked Fallon his name and added several searching questions to prove himself a true Zanidu even though a non-Krishnan.

"The Juru Company, eh?" said one of them. "'Tis said ye all but won the battle single-handed, hurling back hordes of the steppe-dwellers with the missiles from your guns when they sought to roll up your army's flank, until the accursed steam-chariots of the foe at long last drave ye from the field."

"That's a more truthful description of the battle than I expected to hear," replied Fallon.

Another guard said, "'Tis just like the treacherous barbarians to use so unfair a

weapon, against all the principles of civilized warfare."

Fallon refrained from saying that if the Balhibuma had won, the Qaathians would be making the same complaint about their opponents' guns. He asked instead, "What else do you know? Is there any Balhibo army left?"

The first guard made the Krishnan equivalent of a shrug. "'Tis said Chabarian rallied some thousands of his cavalry and fought a skirmish at Malmaj, but was himself there slain. There's talk of withdrawing the remaining soldiery to the eastern provinces for a final stand in the Qe'ba Mountains, but ye know how 'tis in war-time: twenty rumors to one fact. Know ye aught of where the invaders be? Ever since yester-morn folk have come through babbling that the Jungava are hard upon their heels."

"I don't know," said Fallon. "I came by the northern route and haven't seen them. But I should guess they'd be along soon. Now may I go?"

"Aye—when ye've complied with one slight formality. Swear ye allegiance to the

Lord Protector of the Kingdom of Balhib, the high and mighty Pandr, Chindor er-Qinan?"

"Eh? What's all this?"

THE GUARD explained, "Well, Chabarian fell at Malmaj, as ye know. And my lord Chindor, arriving in haste and yet bloody from the battlefield, went to convey the news of these multiple disasters to his Altitude, the Dour Kir. And whilst he was closeted with the Dour, the latter—taken by a fit of melancholy—plucked a dagger from his girdle and slew himself. Then Chindor, seeing that the state without a head would be like a ship without a rudder, prevailed upon the surviving officers of the government to invest him with extraordinary powers to cope with this emergency. So swear ye?"

"Oh, yes, of course," said Fallon; "I swear."

Privately, Fallon suspected that Kir's departure from the world of the living had been hastened by Chindor himself, who might also have coerced the other ministers at sword's point to accede to his dictatorship. But Fallon cared little

which dog finally made off with the unfortunate bone that was Balhib.

Passed by the guard, he rode at a reckless speed through the narrow streets to his own house. He feared that his landlord might have moved new tenants in, as his rent was in arrears. But he was pleased to find the little house just as he had left it.

His one objective now was to collect the other two pieces of Qais' draft, by fair means or foul, and set out for Majbur. If the city were going to fall to the Qaathians—as seemed probable—he could no longer look forward to earning even a precarious living by spying for them, and he had no wish to be caught in a siege and sack of the city if he could help it.

First he would call upon Qais of Babaal, if the latter were still in Zanid. He would try to collect from him; and if Qais asserted that the information came too late to be of value, Fallon would simply run the swine through and take the paper. Qais would be no loss to this or any other world. Then Fallon would go to Kas-

tambang's and try to collect the remaining third of the draft, perhaps with a plausible story of Qais' having given him the paper in token of his indebtedness before fleeing the city.

Fallon hastily washed up, changed his clothes, and stuffed such of his belongings as he did not wish to abandon into a duffle-bag. A few minutes later he went out, locked his door—for the last time, if his plans worked—strapped the bag to the aya's back behind the saddle, and mounted.

THE GATEKEEPER at Tashin's Inn said that yes, indeed, Master Turanj was in his quarters, and the good my lord should go right up. Fallon crossed the court, now strangely deserted by Tashin's histrionic clientele, and went up to Qais' room.

Nobody answered his stroke on the door-gong. He pushed the door, which opened to his touch. When he looked in, his hand flew to his hilt, then came away.

Qais of Babaal lay sprawled across the floor, his jacket stained with brown Krishnan

blood. Fallon turned the corpse over and saw that the spy had been neatly run through, presumably with a rapier. His script lay on the floor beside him amid a litter of papers.

Squatting upon his haunches, Fallon went through these papers. Not finding the slip that he sought, he searched both Qais' body and the rest of the room. He did everything but rip the upholstery apart.

Still no draft. His first foreboding had been correct: Somebody who knew about the trisected draft had murdered Qais to get it.

But who? As far as Fallon could remember, nobody knew about this monetary instrument save Qais, Kastambang, and himself. And it seemed unlikely that Kastambang should send a bravo to do Qais in. The banker had custody of the money; if he wished to embezzle it, he could do so without written instruments to authorize him.

FALLON went over the room again, just to make sure, but found neither the piece of the draft nor clues to the identity of Qais' slayer.

At last he gave up, sighed, and went out. He asked the gatekeeper: "Has anybody else been in to see Turanj recently?"

The fellow thought. "Aye, sir, now that ye call it to mind. About an hour or more ago one did visit him."

"Who? What was he like?"

"He was an Earthman like yourself, and like ye clad in civilized clothes."

"But what did he *look* like? Tall or short? Fat or thin?"

The gatekeeper made a helpless gesture. "That I couldn't tell ye, sir. After all, all Earthmen look alike, do ye not?"

Fallon mounted his aya and set out at a brisk trot to eastward, across the city to Kastambang's bank. This trip might well prove a sleeveless errand, but he could not afford to pass up even the slightest chance of getting his money.

A subdued excitement ran through the streets of Zanid. Here and there Fallon saw a pedestrian running instead of walking. One man shouted as he ran, "The Jungava are in sight! To the walls!"

This might well be true, or it might be another premature

panic. In any case Fallon kept on. He had to hurry if he did not wish to be caught by the closing of the Lummish Gate.

HE TROTTED past a dead Krishnan lying in the gutter. There was no evident reason for the fellow's being dead, nor did anyone seem to be paying the corpse any heed at all—quite unlike the usual habits of the Zaniduma. In the eastern Izandu, he was held up by a troop of civic guards marching by to the beat of a drum. Most were either too old or too young to have gone with the army to Chos, though there were a few who looked as if they had escaped from the battle and returned home. No doubt the remnants of the Juru Company would be likewise pulling itself together to man the walls. But not with Anthony Fallon if he could help it.

Fallon rode on. He passed the House of Judgment, where the execution-board seemed to have more than its normal quota of heads. He did not look at the gruesome tokens closely, but as his eye swept down the line he was struck

by the feeling that one of them was familiar.

Jerking his gaze back, he was horrified to observe that the fleshy head in question, its jowls hanging slack in death, was that of the very Krishnan whom he was on his way to see. The board under the head read:

KASTAMBANG ER-'

AMIRUT,

Banker of the Gabanj,

Aged 103 years 4 months.

Convicted of treason

on the tenth of Harau.

Executed on the twelfth instant.

THE TREASON in question could be nothing but Kastambang's banking for Qais of Babaal, knowing the latter as an agent for Ghuur. And since torture of convicted felons—to make them divulge the names of their confederates—was a recognized part of Balhibo legal procedure, Kastambang in his final agonies might well have mentioned Anthony Fallon. Now Fallon had a reason for getting out of Zanid even more pressing than the prospect of the city's being sur-

rounded and stormed by the Qaathians.

Fallon speeded up to a canter, determined to dash out the Lummish Gate and leave Zanid behind him without more delay. But after he had ridden several blocks, he realized that he was passing Kastambang's counting-house, which lay directly on his route to the gate. As he passed, he could not help noticing that the gates of the bank had been torn from their hinges and smashed, as if by a mob.

Overpowering curiosity led him to pull up and turn his aya into the courtyard. Everywhere were signs of mob depredations. The graceful statues from Katai-Jhogorai littered the pave in fragments. The fountains were silent. Other objects lay about—the smashed remains of strong-boxes and bits of paper. Fallon dismounted and bent to examine them. They were notes, drafts, account-books, and the other paraphernalia of banking.

Fallon guessed that after Kastambang had been arrested, a mob had gathered and, on the pretext that a traitor's goods were fair game, had sacked the

place. But they had taken only cash and valuables, scattering or destroying the things that they did not understand.

THERE WAS just a chance that at least one of the thirds of Qais' drafts might be found here. He really should not, Fallon thought, take the time to search for it, with Zanid such a hot spot. But it might be his final chance to recover Zamba.

And what about the mysterious murderer of Qais, the Krishnan-dressed Earthman? Had this character preceded Fallon here to Kastambang's? Was he lurking on the premises now?

Fallon went around the courtyard, examining every scrap of paper. Nothing there.

He passed on in, finding the battered corpse of one of Kastambang's Kolofto servants sprawled just inside the main door. The poor primitive must have tried to defend his absent master's property, while the others of the household had fled, or more prudently joined in the looting.

Now where would these fragments of the draft most likely

be? Well, Kastambang had stowed his third in the drawer of that big table in his underground conference-room. Fallon resolved that he would search that room; and if he failed to find the paper there, he would leave the city forthwith.

The elevator was, of course, not running, but he found a stairway that led down to the lower level. He took a lamp from a wall-bracket, filled its reservoir from another lamp and trimmed the wick, and lit it with his pocket-lighter. Then he descended the stairs.

The passage was dark except for that one lamp. His footsteps and breath sounded loud in the silence.

FALLON'S "bump of direction" carried him through the sequence of doors and chambers to Kastambang's "lair". The portcullis had not even been lowered. A couple of coins that the mob had dropped winked up from the floor; but the door to the lair itself was closed.

Now why? thought Fallon. If the mob had stormed in and

out, they would not likely have taken the trouble to close doors behind them. Fallon looked closely.

The door was not quite closed, but ajar, and a thread of light showed under it. Hand on hilt, Fallon put a foot against the door and pushed. The door swung open.

The room was lit by a candle in the hands of a Krishnan woman, who stood with her back to the door. Facing Fallon on the other side of the conference-table stood an Earthman. As the door opened the woman spun around. The man looked up and whipped out a sword.

The *whEEP* caused Fallon to snatch out his own blade as a matter of reflex, though when he got it out he stood holding it, his mouth gaping with astonishment. The woman was Gazi er-Doukh and the man was Welcome Wagner in Krishnan costume.

"Hello, Gazi," said Fallon. "Is this another jagain? You're changing them fast nowadays."

"Nay, Antane; methinks he does indeed have the true religion, that for which I've long sought."

AS GAZI spoke, Fallon took in the fact that the huge table had been assualted with ax and chisel until it was a mere ruin of its splendid self. The drawers had all been hacked or forced open and the papers that had lain in them were scattered about the floor. In front of Wagner on the scarred surface lay two small rectangular slips of paper. Though Fallon could not read them from where he stood, he was sure from their size and shape that they were the fragments that he sought.

He said to Wagner, "Where'd you get those?"

"One from the guy that had it, and the other outa this drawer," said Wagner. "Sure took me long enough to find it, too."

"Well, they're mine. I'll take them, if you don't mind."

Wagner picked up the two slips with his left hand and pocketed them. "That's where you're wrong, mister. These don't belong to nobody; so if there's any money in it, it'll go to the True Church where it belongs, to help spread the light. I suppose you got the other piece?"

"Hand those over," said Fallon, moving nearer.

"You hand yours over," said Wagner, stepping out from behind the table. "I don't aim to hurt you none, Jack, but Ecumenical Monotheism needs that dough a lot worser'n you do."

Fallon took another step, saying, "You killed Qais, didn't you?"

"It was him or me. Now do like I say. Remember, I used to be pretty hot with these stickers before I seen the truth."

"How did you find out about him?"

"I went to Kastambang's trial and heard the testimony. Gazi knowed about the check being tore in three parts, so I put two and two together."

"CEASE THIS mammer-ing!" said Gazi, setting down her candle on the table. "You can divide the gold, or fight your battle elsewhere; but with the city on the edge of falling we've no time for private wannion."

"Always my practical little sweetheart," said Fallon, and then to Wagner again: "A fine

holy man you are! You intend to murder two men and run off with the loot and the lady, all in the name of your god..."

"You don't understand these things," said Wagner mildly. "I ain't doing nothing immoral like you did. Gazi and me are gonna have strictly spiritual relations. She'll be my sister in God..."

At that instant Wagner leaped catlike, his rapier shooting out ahead of him. Fallon parried just in time to save his life; Wagner stopped his riposte-double with ease. The blades flickered and gleamed in the dimness, *swish-zing-clank!*

The space was too confined for fancy footwork, and Fallon found himself hampered by the lamp in his left hand. His exertions scattered drops of oil about. Wagner's arm was strong, and his swordplay fast and adroit.

Fallon had just made up his mind to throw the lamp into Wagner's taut, fanatic face when Gazi, crying: "Desist, lackwits!" caught his tunic from behind with both hands and pulled. Fallon took one staggering step backwards, and

then his foot slipped on some pieces of paper. Wagner lunged.

Fallon saw the missionary's point coming towards his midriff just too late to prevent it. His parry was still forming when the point disappeared from his view, and an icy pain shot through his body.

WAGNER withdrew his blade and stepped back, still on guard. Fallon heard, above the roaring in his ears, the clang as his own sword fell to the stone floor from his limp hand. His knees buckled under him and he slid to the floor in a heap.

Dimly he was aware of his lamp's striking the floor and going out; of an exclamation from Gazi, though what it meant he could not tell; of Wagner's fumbling through his scrip for the fragment of the draft; and lastly of the retreating footsteps of Wagner and Gazi. Then everything was dark and quiet.

Fallon was never sure whether he had lost consciousness or not, and if so for how long. But an indefinite time later, finding himself asprawl on the

floor in the dark with his tunic soaked with blood and his wound hurting like fury, it seemed to him that this would be a rotten place to die.

He began crawling towards the door. Even in his present condition, he did not mistake the direction. He dragged himself a few meters before exhaustion stopped him.

A while later he crawled a few meters more. He made a fumbling effort to feel his own pulse, but failed to find it.

Another rest, another crawl. And another, and another. He was getting weaker and weaker, so that each crawl was shorter.

Hours later, it seemed, he found the foot of the stair down which he had come. Now, could he even consider crawling up all those steps, when it was all he could do to pull himself along horizontally?

Well, he would not live any longer for not trying. He hitched himself up the first step. Then the second. He seemed to be bleeding more and wondered which would get him first: loss of blood, internal infection, or damage to

some vital organ. Come on, another step...

ROQIR HAD set behind the buildings of Zanid when Fallon opened his eyes. He had been lying unconscious in the gutter just outside Kastambang's bank, and had been roused by a tremendous hubub in the street. A procession was passing by, headed by aya-riders in fur hats beating kettle-drums slung in pairs across their saddles. Others played outlandish musical instruments, the general effect being a horrid braying jangle.

Then came a bishtar, looking miles high to Fallon's worm's eye view, with a fancy howdah on its back. In the howdah sat a person in trappings of barbaric magnificence, who leaned over the edge, looked down at Fallon, and barked words in the harsh Qaathian tongue.

Immediately Krishnans surrounded Fallon, who looked up into a circle of Qaathian faces. But then another face appeared, shouldering the steppe-dwellers aside to look down in its turn.

"Percy," breathed Fallon, and lost consciousness again.

ANTHONY FALLON came to in a clean bed in a strange room. As his vision cleared he recognized Dr. Nung.

"Hello, Doctor," he said.

"Better now?" said Nung, who then did to him all the things that physicians do to patients to determine their state of health. Fallon learned that he was in the consul's house. Some time later, the doctor went out and came back with two Earthmen, Percy Mjipa and a leathery-looking white man.

Mjipa said, "Fallon, this is Adam Daly, one of my missing Earthmen. I got them all back."

After acknowledging the introduction in his ghost of a voice, Fallon said: "What happened? How did I get here?"

"The Kamuran saw you lying in the gutter in the course of his triumphal procession up to the royal palace and told his flunkies to toss you out with the other offal. Lucky for you, I happened along. As it was you were within minutes of going out for good by the time

I got you here. Nung just pulled you through."

"The Qaathians took Zanid?"

"Surrender on conditions. I arranged the conditions, mainly by convincing Ghuur that the Zaniduma would fight to the death otherwise, and by threatening to stand in front of the Geklan Gate myself while he tried to knock it down with a battering-ram. These natives respect firmness when they see it, you know, and Ghurr's not such a fool as to court trouble with Novorecife. I'm not supposed to interfere, but I didn't care to see Ghuur's barbarians ruin a perfectly good city."

"What were the conditions?"

"OH, BALHIB to retain local autonomy under Chindor as Pandr—a treacherous swine, but there didn't seem any alternative. And no more than two thousand Qaathians to be let into the city at once, to discourage robbery and abuse of the Zaniduma."

"Could you hold Ghuur to that, once he got the gates open?"

"He lived up to it. His record of keeping his word is better than that of most of these native headmen. And besides, I think he was a little afraid of me. You see he'd never seen an Earthman with my skin-color, and the superstitious beggar thought I was some sort of demon."

"I see," murmured Fallon. He understood one thing now: that quaint as some of Mjipa's affectations of superiority to the "natives" might be, they had the partial justification that Percy Mjipa was, as an individual, a superior sort of Earthman. Perhaps, thought Fallon in one of his rare flashes of self-analysis, that was why he had always resented the consul in some subtle and subconscious manner: because he knew that Mjipa was a better man than himself.

Fallon quickly pushed this unwelcome thought aside. "How about the missing Earthmen?"

"Oh, that. Ghuur's men had carried them off—another coup arranged by your late friend Qais. The Kamuran has a hideout in Madhiq where he

makes arms, and there he had these three taken."

"But they've been pseudo-hypnotized..."

"Yes, and un-pseudo-hypnotized as well. Seems there's a Krishnan psychologist who studied at Vienna many years ago, before the technological blockade was tightened up, and he had worked out a method of undoing the Saint-Remy treatment. He worked his stunt on these three, and—you tell it, Mr. Daly."

ADAM DALY cleared his throat. "When we'd had the treatment the Kamuran came to us and told us to invent something to beat Balhibuma, or else. There was no use pretending we couldn't, or didn't know how, and so forth. He even had another Earthman—some fellow we never heard of—hailed in and his head chopped off in front of us just to show us he wasn't fooling. So we got to work.

"We thought of guns, of course, but none of us could mix gunpowder. We knew, theoretically, that black powder is made of sulphur, charcoal, and saltpeter; but as

none of us was a geologist or a chemist, we had no notion of what saltpeter looked like or where to get it. Also, as I recall, the mixing is pretty tricky.

"But we did know enough practical engineering to make a passable reciprocating steam-engine, especially as the Kamuran had a surprisingly fine machine-shop set up for us. So we built a tank, armored with qong-wood planks and armed with a fixed catapult. The first couple didn't work, but the third was good enough to serve as a pilot model for mass production.

"The Kamuran ordered twenty-five of the things and pushed the project with all his power; but what with shortages of metals and things, only seventeen of them were actually started—and what with breakdowns and bugs only three arrived at the battle. And from what I hear of the musketry of the Balhibo army, I take it that Balhib had been doing something similar."

"Yes," said Fallon, "but that was an all-Krishnan project. "Good-bye technological blockade. And I see the day when

the sword will be as useless here as on Earth, and all the time I spent learning to fence will be wasted. By the way, Percy, what happened to the Safq?"

MJIPA REPLIED, "Under the treaty Ghuur has control of all armament facilities, so when the priests of Yesht closed their doors on his men he had 'em pile the Balhibo army's remaining store of powder against the doors and blew 'em in. It shook up the whole city, and several people were killed by flying stones."

"Did the Qaathians find a couple of Krishnan philosophers named Sainian and Zar-rash in the crypt?"

"I believe they did."

"Where are they now?"

"I don't know; I suppose Ghuur has them in confinement while he decides what to do with them."

"Well, try to get 'em free, will you? I promised I'd try to help 'em."

"I'll see what I can do," said Mjipa.

"And where's that ass Fred-ro?"

"He's happy, photographing

and making rubbings in the Safq. I persuaded Chindor to give him the run of the place after Liyara the Brazer—for reasons you can guess—prevailed upon the Protector to suppress the cult of Yesht. Fredro's babbling with excitement; says he's already proved that Myande the Execrable was not only a historical character but built the Safq as a monument to his father—who wasn't Kharaj but some other chap. Kharaj, it seems, was centuries earlier, and the myths mixed them all up. And Myande was called the Execrable not because of anything he did to his old man, but because he beggared his kingdom and ran all his subjects ragged building the thing... But if you're interested he'll be glad to tell you himself."

FALLON sighed. "Percy, you seem able to fix up everything for everybody, except getting me back my kingdom." He turned to Daly. "You know, those tanks of yours wouldn't have been worth a brass arzu against anybody who knew about them ahead of time. They could easily have

been ditched, or overturned, or set afire."

"I know, but the Balhibuma didn't," said Daly.

Fallon turned back to Mjipa. "How about Gazi and Wagner and those peoples? And my friend Kordaq?"

Mjipa frowned in thought. "As far as I know, Captain Kordaq never came back from Chos; so he's either dead, or a slave in Qaath. Gazi's living with Fredro."

Fallon grinned wryly. "Why, the old..."

"I know. He took an apartment; said he'd probably be here for a year or more, so... Dismal Dan Wagner, you'll be pleased to hear, tried to lower himself down the city wall by a rope one night and was shot by a Qaathian archer."

"Fatally?"

"Yes. It seems he'd been trying to reach Majbur to cash a draft from the late Qais on Kastambang's bank, not knowing that the Balhibo government sent orders by the last train from Zanid to the Majbur bank to sequester Kastambang's account, he being a convicted traitor."

"Unh," said Fallon. "You mean I fought that lunatic in Kastambang's cellar and got myself nearly killed for nothing?"

"Precisely. But that's the way it is with you chaps."

Dr. Nung appeared, saying: "You must go now, gentlemen. The patient has to rest."

"Very well," said Mjipar, rising. "Oh, one more thing. As soon as you're well enough to travel, we shall have to smuggle you out of the city. The Zaniduma know you spied for Ghuur; and while they can't arrest and try you openly, a lot of them have sworn to assassinate you at the first opportunity."

"Thanks," said Fallon without enthusiasm.

A KRISHNAN year later, a disreputable-looking

Earthman slouched along the streets of Mishe, the capital of Mikardand. His eyes were bloodshot, his face bore a stubble of beard, and his gait was unsteady.

He had peddled a small item of gossip to Mishe's newspaper, the oldest of Krishna. He had drunk half the proceeds and was on his way with the remainder to the dismal room that he shared with a Mikardando woman of notorious character. As he staggered along, Anthony Fallon muttered. The passing Knight of Qarar who turned to stare did not understand the words, not knowing English, but what he heard was:

"'F I can only work one deal—one good old coup—I'll get an army, and I'll take that ruddy army to Zamba, and I'll be king again... Yesh, *king!*"

~~~~~ THE END ~~~~~

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Now that you've finished this story, we want to know if your feeling about it, and about serial novels in this magazine, is the same as "The Reckoning" indicates. Don't put it off — use that voting coupon, or send us a letter or postal card today! Yours is the last word — but we have to hear you say it, don't we?



# The Last Word

*(Yours, of course, Gentle Reader)*

## INSATIABLE CURIOSITY

Dear Editor:

Having been an avid SF fan for about 10 years (since I was about 12 years old, in fact), my views may very well be limited. However, I consider myself, presumptuous though it sounds, to be an average fan with the average IQ. Anyway, my idea is this:

Anyone who reads science fiction, first and foremost, must have an insatiable curiosity for scientific fact. Secondly, he must be able to enjoy fiction. Fiction, in itself, is available in many forms; but scientific facts or theories are available in only two forms, *ie* cold, hard scientific journals and papers; and science fiction. Since most scientific papers are not explained in such a way as to be understood completely by the average reader, we turn to science fiction.

I, personally, would like to see "love stories" and "hero-type" adventure stories abolished from science fiction. Articles like "The Littlest" by Isaac Asimov are more than welcome. In fact, such articles are the first items that I read in any science fiction magazine.

As for befogging and befuddling your readers—well, credit us with some intelligence. After all (according to me) our scientific curiosity is insatiable; so obviously, we must have at least a basic knowledge of some of the mysteries of science.

Let's face it. One shortcoming of our democratic society is the unavailability of scientific fact for the average person. We have to first obtain the scientific facts from books and papers, and then find someone with the time, patience, and ability to explain these facts to us.

Give us good stories based on facts, or imaginative take-off on facts, restricting yourself to a few basic laws of science, of course; and we will gladly pay the necessary 35¢ per copy to enlighten ourselves and give us some food for thought.

*RALPH G. MONKMAN*  
*Nashwaaksis, NB, Canada*

Hmm, in order to agree with your statement that all science-fiction readers have an insatiable curiosity for scientific fact, we'd have to specify, first of all, that a large percentage of material labelled "science fiction" is *not* science fiction. Thus, people who go only for the Flash Gordon type of adventure fantasy, or for the—shall we say "apocalyptic superstition fantasy"—cannot be considered science-fiction readers. I'd include in the latter category of fantasy such stories as the "Shaver mystery"

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yarns (both by Shaver himself, and others who follow his vein); the Atlantis and Lemurian type tales not trued into the "mystery"; the flying saucer genre, and so on.

Psi stories, per se, don't necessarily fit into this non-scientific, anti-scientific, or superstition-swallowing category, although a person whose "science fiction" reading was devoted exclusively to this type of tale might be ruled out of the science fictionists' circle. I say *might*—it all depends upon whether the particular reader's attitude toward the material is "this is *true*" or "this is in-

teresting exploration of what *may be* fact, or facts yet to be substantiated."

Again, a particular reader of the two categories above may be drawn to them only by a combination of amusement and fascination with their imaginative qualities—without harboring any belief that these are revelations of reality hidden from most people and that any substantiating evidence is suppressed by powers-that-be, etc. Similarly, a particular reader of what we both agree is "true science fiction" may also be interested solely in the imaginative aspects of it, and have little

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or no interest in science and scientific possibility, etc.

Let's see, who was it who said that no general statement is entirely reliable, and added that this statement should be included?

### ON PARODY

Dear RAWI

I'm glad to see that you have stopped labelling the various delightful bits of verse you run as "parodies". They aren't, you know.

A parody of "The Demolished Man", for example, would have to be a novel, dealing with the same subject matter as Bester's tale and to a certain extent following the original's story line, in caricature. Garrett and Sherman, in

their "reviews in verse" did caricature the originals very well. Their offerings had parodistic elements—but as I said above the form employed excludes them from the category of parody.

What about the jingles based on Gilbert? They aren't parodies, either. They are very good pastiches of Sir William's style. But you can't parody humor which has elements of parody in it.

But let me repeat, so long as you don't mislabel such efforts I'm heartily in favor of seeing more of them.

*R. S. DANNON,  
Queens, New York.*

Point well taken.

[Turn Page]

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tion". Well, I thought, maybe this will be on a different track.

It was, hallelujah! This is the sort of article I like to see about current developments. I can get the facts and so forth from the papers and newsmagazines long before any science fiction book brings out an article on the latest marvel. One or two treatments by science fiction writers aren't too bad, but you don't see just one or two, and by the time the sixth or seventh comes out it's all just too familiar. So congrats

[Turn Page]

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again to you and Dr. Macklin for doing something different and doing it very well.

Needless to say, I'm enjoying "Tower of Zanid". It looks, so far, like the best of the series—and if that turns out to be the case, I sure hope it won't be the last!

HARRY LOBEN,  
Pittsburgh, Penna.

We have always agreed with John W. Campbell that a science fiction magazine is not a news-sheet, and cannot compete with same. And

while science fiction readers may be interested in interpretations of the news, we feel that this should be related to science fiction when such interpretations are run in sf magazines.

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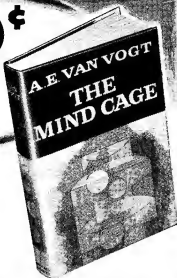
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